



The Cenacle

Number 69 & June 2009

A black and white photograph of a weathered wall. The wall is covered in graffiti, including two handprints at the top and a large, stylized word at the bottom. A rectangular metal plate is visible on the wall. To the right of the wall is a brick wall.

**THIS RATHER SIMPLE EPITAPH CAN SAVE YOUR HIDE,
YOUR FALLING MIND**

**FATE ISN'T WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST
THERE'S NO DESIGN, NO FLAWS TO FIND
THERE'S NO DESIGN, NO FLAWS TO FIND.**

THE SHINS, "YOUNG PILGRIMS," 2003.

dope

June 25, 2009
6:09 p.m.
Starbucks at
Pioneer Courthouse Square
Portland, Oregon

Start with a word, now several, & little knowing the path. Look through the window & around the square, there is movement, but is there knowing? Passion, uncertainty, hunger, confusion, greed, loss, & on, but little knowing. I began this before, last night, in another place, began it several times, as a letter to one friend, then another, then to nobody, & gave up each time. A day has passed, here is this hour, this passing now, & this try. I wanted to say something, perhaps to you, perhaps just to myself & later you look on, but I really don't know what or to whom. I started again because I am stubborn, & because there is too much to say, not too little.

I wanted to say to you that in your worst hour you are not alone,

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whether you wish it or not. I wanted to say to you that things change but not, it seems, by formula, not predictably, not hung upon any pattern, though men will seek the pattern, & sometimes write wildly of what they find. I wanted to say it's possible the best & the worst is yet to come, even as they have come before.

There's a wild card in things, I think that's the blossom of this thought. Pattern, prediction, habit, tradition, these are all aspects of the human hunger to grasp certainty, build upon its solid ground. But then... & then... & now... a wild card in things, in nature, in the human heart, in the cosmos itself. It is perhaps where both Art & God source, the unnameable spark that flashes through a moment, as likely one of yours as anyone else's, & this is why you are not alone, because this spark, this wild card is as much a presence in your life, as everyone else's. Not just men & women, but each & all that exists, the wild card that recurs, & thus one hour's feast & another's famine.

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What to do with this, if any-
thing? I don't know because it is
not a reassuring idea. It takes one's
life & brings another fortune. It serves
neither any sense of good or evil. It
is, or at least seems, to me, to be.
If one calls it God, perhaps that
means it can heed prayers, aid when
one is in trouble, demand obedience
or crush a heretic. If one calls it Art,
then one is compelled to look inward,
draw with craft & care from one's stores,
hunger for those moments when one's
inspiration rides it with like a
steed of light—

The city downtown is breezy & green
as dusk settles. Cars, trains, bodies
pass & someone in view—the scruffy
man with the camera, the woman
covered in veils, someone in that
group with shopping bags—will die
tonight, tomorrow, or leave this
city within hours for Iran or China,
or meet the person who will change
everything—I don't even think the
wild card knows—though gurus, gypsies,
& preachers will say for your coins—

If even the wild card does not know, in its million manifestations, then what? Hope, despair? Yes, each, both, & neither. Something. You.

You are the wild card, as am I, as are each & all. Arrived to this world without instructions, taught by others who believe, who doubt, who do ~~not~~ know, eventually become another of these, given to persuasion or acquiescence leading others into the murky ahead, or following others, or resisting with no fundamentally better, surer ground under foot, you are the wild card.

Now what will you do, if you accept this idea? I can't say your life will be easier, or last longer, or end more peacefully. I can't say at all but I can say this: I believe that voices were meant to be used to sing, minds were meant to imagine, hearts to feel every possible emotion, & nothing that has or is or will ever exist in this world is unimportant. Once made, you do, & do again, & fail, & succeed, & again, & again.

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Think of yourself, not young
with all of life ahead of you, but
old & sick. Your sleep brings dull
dreams, your legs ache to walk,
your loved ones, many, are deceased,
& the times you live in no longer
seem your own. What between
now & then, if anything? What
indeed. The wild card, aka allows
you a world of possible redemption,
beginning this moment, or a
rapid disruption to every effort you
are about to make. You are the wild
card, & so is all else -

This coffeehouse has a glass roof, &
through it the blue sky above, &
a bit of a skyscraper. A woman I
loved told me her mother worked
in that tower. This was said years
ago. Years before that, I sat in a
coffee house like this, in winter,
far from here, looking at the snow
falling on its glass roof. Many
loves, many roofs.

A woman with a suitcase smiles happily
& hugs her arrived companion.

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Wild card. You are a wild card, or
so these words claim. Consider
this an invitation, even a challenge.
What I've learned best to share
here is that nobody sees far ahead
into the ~~mark~~, but culture
seems to shape ground the pre-
dictions & proselytizations of those
further ahead than most. Consider
the wise, the famous, the beautiful,
the gifted, the powerful - & laugh
a little. Go on, right now. Laugh,
just a little, for all they have,
for even more that they don't. Laugh
& then two fingers to your lips,
& a kiss for each & all.

Many words, many paths, one path,
no path. Wild card, many wild
cards, none. Your choice: what will
you do? I wish I knew. I wish
you well, every one of you.

DS, 6-25-2009



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Jim Burke III



Editor's Note: The following is the twenty-eighth in an ongoing series derived from the correspondence between Jim Burke III and myself, begun in 1992, and in the spirit of the more enthused letter-writing tradition of yesteryear.

June 2, 2009
MDC Reservoir
West Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Ray,

I meant to begin this letter last week, but the idea of truth as put forth in your letter¹, and the present state of our culture's ideas of truth, made the writing of it perplexing to say the least.

The theme of your letter seemed to display a level of despair on how we can perceive the truth—the absolute gut-wrenching, soul-twisting truth—during our limited stay in physical form on this planet (at least this time around!). I have only recently come to the conclusion that there are different levels of truth perceived by different people, depending on each individual's relative view of our cultural transparency. This view, or subjective opinion, related directly to individual intellect, can range from very narrow—almost down to the non-existent—to a wide spectrum of analytical and philosophical thought. The truth, ultimately, is a venue to realize self-actualization, whether it be by the pursuit of art, love, peace, or a number of absolutes in their highest form. The one characteristic that all these have in common is a resolution of what I refer to as “truth intensity.”

Most sociologists will agree that our consciousness of our surroundings is what distinguishes the human race from most other life forms on this planet. The term “social animals”² was coined decades ago to describe this. However, this is where the definition ends. The degree to which we (you and I specifically, Ray) resolve the conflict between truth and transparency can help us realize that the former depends on the latter. In other words, when the truth demands that Bush, Cheney, Rove, Gonzales (among others) be indicted and tried for various crimes, the transparency of our culture becomes self-evident. Unfortunately, the majority of our culture wants to hide the obvious truth from the rest of the world. I know that, just as it has taken decades to reveal *enough* of the truth about John Kennedy's assassination (or *coup d'état*), so it may be a lifetime before all the truth comes out regarding the worst presidential administration in the history of this country. The absolute truth might be a new beginning for this country and our culture, or it might shatter the transparency to the point where people would become apathetic to the point of utter complacency (this is what the elitist Republican Right would love anyway, a complacent robot-like society, paying \$5 a gallon for gas, and forever—perhaps “truth intensity” is a compromise after all!). Which would be worse? Nobody can know until, and unless, it happens. I prefer to think that this is the kind

¹ Letter to Jim Burke III, 3/2/2009, “Notes from the Northwest,” *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009.

² Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 1972.

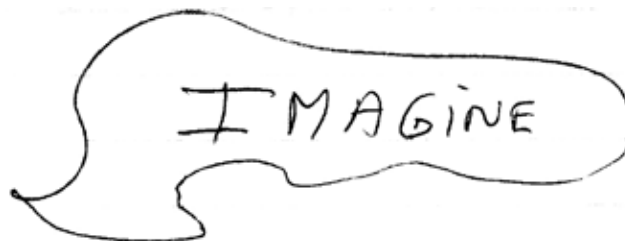
of “truth intensity” that would shake up this country once and for all. I prefer to think that it has already happened, at least to some degree. I agree that Obama could be the answer to the nation’s hopes and dreams, and a beginning to what could be and might be (i.e., no war, universal education and healthcare and, most of all, *opportunity*). However, I caution myself that the atrocities of the Vietnam War didn’t accomplish this, even after the assassinations of the Kennedys, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and others. It took a vile “leader” named Bush to set in motion an historic election by his mistakes in Iraq, including torture, greed, lying to Congress, and betraying the United States Constitution as a whole. The people of this country, the majority at least, decided that Bush and his evil-doers had embarrassed them enough. The “truth intensity” got Bush elected, and then conversely got him fired. But that’s as far as it will go. The politicians do not want the world to see a former administration’s sins exposed to the world—I’m not sure I do either, although I certainly believe he should be punished, plead guilty, and exiled to Elba *a la* Napoleon!

I have to admit I went the complacency route before. I decided to go back to school (check), get a couple of degrees (check), get married and have a family (check, check), have a good job (check), and now . . . My point is I went that way before I paid my dues with the blues.

I would be ready for *anything* that an investigation of Bush and his cronies revealed, but the American people would not. The idea of him admitting (Cheney has done so already, of course) that he approved of torture would divide the “truth intensity” of this population for a long, long time. These kind of revelations have a reverse effect of people’s notions of the absolute truth. Validity is attached to facts only if the intellect permits. A lot of people, even though many voted for Obama, do not want to know the truth, especially by way of revelation. I believe this is the type of cultural hypnosis that must be broken. It may occur in my lifetime, it may not. As you stated, there is hope on the horizon and the worse recession in our history will bottom out in another year. (On a personal note, the only event I hope to be still alive to witness is a man on the planet Mars.) So if you can’t get by on art alone, don’t worry, be happy, and remember—you, I, and people who maintain a better vision will enjoy life for what it brings us. Being out of work sucks but you will find something and, just maybe Bush, Cheney, Rove, Gonzales, et. al. will be hung out to dry like my dirty, smelly socks!

Peace & Love
J. Pitt

P.S. And remember, if all else fails, and the world’s got you by the balls, we *will* all become stars when we “die.”



Joe Ciccone



Where's the OFF switch?

The last time we closed our eyes
We were young.

The night was wide; we met in a dream
resembling Volterra.

In the meantime, time began,
Everyone died, and something pulled us

By our belt-loops through a hall of doors,
Closing, one by one, behind us.

You and me, the rough-riders, approximate folk singers,
High-stepping it through the darkness,

I say to you, "Kiss me," but you're up ahead
Holding up the world.

You call back, "Pick out a star,"
But they're moving too fast across the sky.

On the Banks of Lake Ontario

We watch as a boat falls off the horizon.
For a moment we stop planning how to get a piece of it;
And suddenly it's all ours.

Love

That which compels water to water;
An ocean that cannot be swept away.

Dream Sequence

First, my friend the endless conversationalist.
Next, a line of goons heading toward the carnival.
Suddenly the first birds gathering for departure.
At some point, a charred pier leaning into the green tide.
The ghost of New Jersey howling.
Lastly, a monologue about how tomorrow I will be young again.

Apocalypse

They will come in the night, four ghosts by horseback.
 They will come without reasons.
 They will come to take us away.

Essay on Roads

At some point a thing unknown and massive
 Will simply fall to the Earth and claim us.

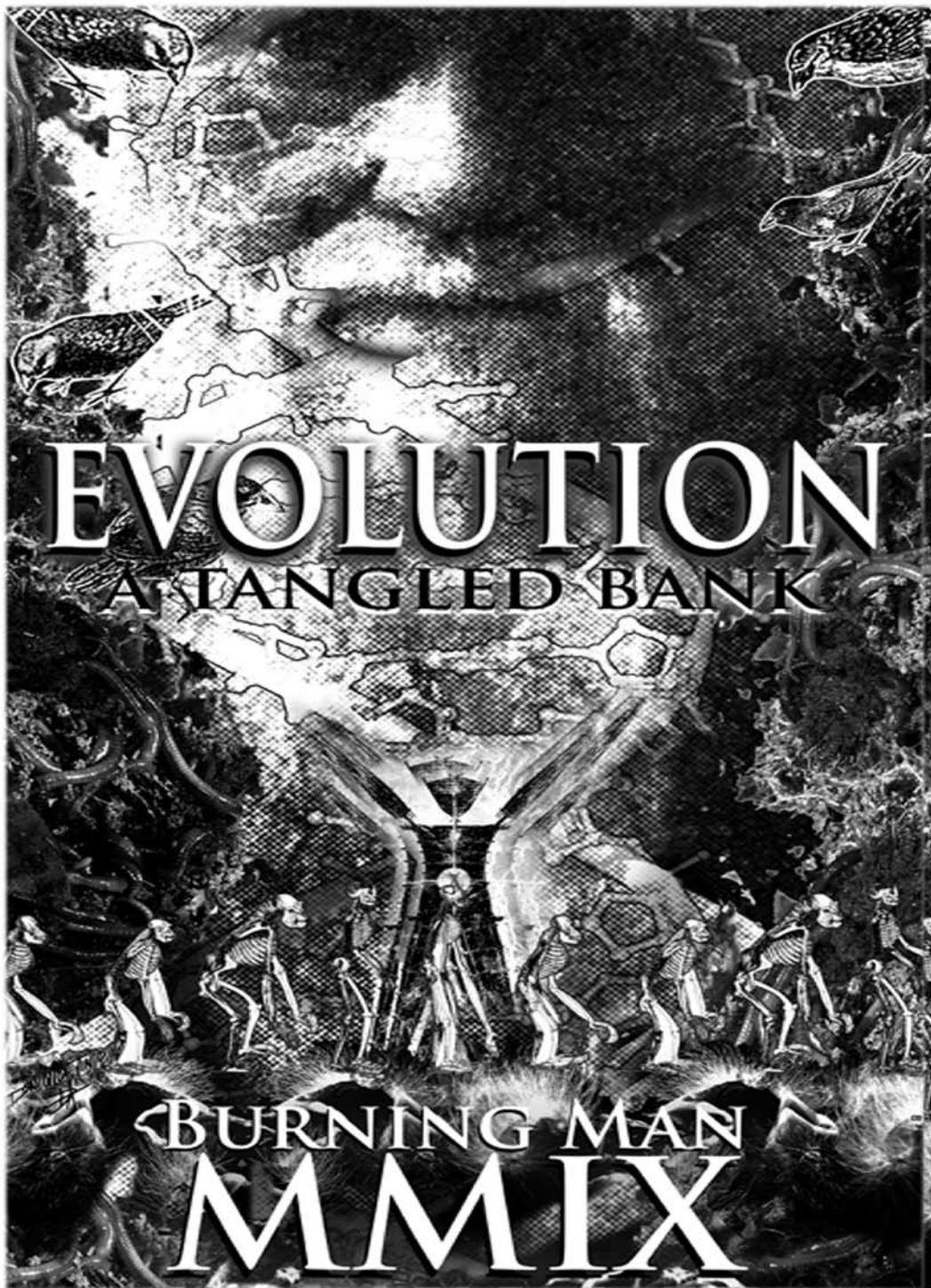
But while this Cadillac moves effortless through the night
 I know I must still be alive.

The important part of roads is to be on one.

The Modern Poet

I cannot read or write.
 I can see, but not that well.
 I can hear, but only what I want to hear.

I can feel, but I can't describe it.
 I try to live, but mostly I just sort of sit around.
 I love, but this has nothing to do with words.
 Because I cannot read or write.



Black Rock City, Nevada

August 31-September 7, 2009

<http://www.burningman.com>

Christopher Patrick Gose



World's Window: Ruminations Entheonautic and Otherwise, Being an Account of My Travels in the New World

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009)

2/20/2009 Cusco, Peru

*In the body of the world, they say, there is a soul
and you are that*

*But we have ways within each other
that will never be said by anyone*

—J'allaludin Rumi

Yesterday we taxi'd from Ollantaytambo all the way back to Cusco. An hour and a half in total, our route veered south at Urubamba, circumventing Pisaq and taking us up to the high grass planes of Chinchero. Peruvian peasants in traditional Andean wear herding flocks of sheep and llama, occasioned honks—a roadside greeting—from our driver. It was nice to indulge the extra soles for a taxi ride; I think it's important to every so often opt for comfort during periods of extended travel.

Though described in ethnobotanical literature as a place of particular interest, Chinchero struck my untrained eye as rather drab—a formless chaos of whitewashed dwelling cubes around a thin stretch of highway. There is a large, rectangular grass field in the center of the town, with children playing soccer and couples kissing on benches. While Peruvians seem for the most part quite conservative in terms of public displays of affection, the parks and plazas seemed to be a safe haven for couples in tight embrace, tongues locked in wet and probing discoveries of one another. We passed through Chinchero quickly, like a summer's breeze.

We spent most of our afternoon in Cusco resting at the hostel—our room quite small and simple excepting the luxury of two—yes, two—windows. Es una ventana al mundo. In



World-Window

the evening, we walked down to the Plaza de Armas, quite lively and somehow alight in the dim and starless evening.

One of the most endearing aspects of traveling in less industrialized countries is the sense of simple things. Last night, I went out and bought four white candles. Gratefulbear and I sat silently in the candle-lit darkness, burning the fragrant wood of the Palo Santo tree to brighten our olfactory pallet. Throughout this trip, we've both found great comfort in familiar memories, each an hallucination: the smell of our favorite breakfast cereal, a rhythm wafting through the air, a turn of English phrasing.

I seem to have lost my iPod, which had become something of a crutch anyways, as well as a book I finished in the earlier part of our trip. I guess it was their time—they may have been

stolen, or possibly I misplaced them. We'll never know. Both are bound to happen.

I have been giving considerable thought to the whole notion of biological imprinting as the basis of the archetypes. This last summer, during a period of accelerated personal change, I seemed to devote particular attention to the *anima mundi* ("world soul") iteration set of the maternal imprint, perhaps as a result of my initial reading of Jung's *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (not the last). I think some of the seeds of the concepts developed in *Mysterium*



Llama

are foreshadowed in *Alchemical Studies*, where Jung lectures brilliantly on the dual motherhood that was implicit in the philosophy of Paracelsus (often considered the father of Occidental medicine). Paracelsus seems to have shared with me the confabulation of a distant personal mother. As a result, in his philosophy, you see particular emphasis on the *Alma mater*—patron mother—a compensatory mechanism that loosens the grip of the consuming mother as a nascent imprint. Paracelsus found personal peace in what George Macdonald terms the "symbols of nature," expressed in Paracelsian philosophy as the *Lumen Naturae*: the light of nature. Several of the principles of homeopathic (as arguably effective/ineffective as homeopathy is) medicine can be traced back to the Paracelsian sensibility.

Back on the first of January 2001, I arrived in Bodhgaya, India, after a fitful night of sleep, intermittently disturbed by the constant barking of metal loud horns announcing the New Year in the city of Gaya. New Year's Day evening, I befriended a Tibetan monk, face smeared with mud and robed in tatters of red and gold. Strapped to each of his hands were the wooden prayer blocks that are part of the prayer-form of the preliminary stages of the Maha Mantra training of the Gelugpa. Slapping the blocks together at the heart level, joined hands are extended overhead, then plunged downward and out as the body is extended fully on the ground in complete prostration. The heart prayer of Tibetan Buddhism is recited with each prostration: Om Mani Padme Hung. Pilgrims will do this tens and hundreds of thousands of times in preparation for the second stage of Maha Mantra, the visualization of the world as a bodhimandala, pure and enlightened.

Over the language barrier, we somehow befriended one another and I agreed to cover his housing for the evening and a Tuk Tuk the next morning to Bodhgaya itself. I have always felt that pilgrims along the road—no matter their destination—embody our own capacity to recognize our own best nature as we travel to destinations unknown. So it was with this young monk, who—while I slept fitfully—slept motionlessly all night long.

There was no fanfare as I arrived into Bodhgaya, somewhat traumatized by my brush with Indian law in Banares. I saw from a distance the Mahabodhi temple, with the Bodhi Tree itself—of the species *Ficus religiosa*—looming like a great mountain over the central plaza. Occasionally the thick and dense seeds would fall, while scurrying pilgrims jockeyed below to catch them like sports fans at a baseball game. I didn't visit the temple itself for a week, instead re-reading *The Hobbit* at the Om Cafe amidst the tent city of restaurants and pilgrims' quarters. We quickly became tight friends with the owners at the cafe, and the smattering of travelers who had come to this most remote and inhospitable of pilgrimage destinations. During this week, I visited the various temples surrounding the central Mahabodhi complex. Of particular note, the Bhutanese temple had scenes from the Buddha's life carved in the most intricate design into their temple, ornately painted in bright and shaded pastels, much like the stone dyes of the Tibetan thangka style. At the far end of the temple walkways sat the immense and towering statue of the Maitreya, future Buddha of the next age, echoing the millenarian sentiment common to most major world religions.

When I eventually visited the Bodhi tree, I took with me no particularly religious sentiments of nostalgia. I almost felt obligated to visit the tree, having come so far. More like a tourist than a pilgrim, I entered the temple, a labyrinth of chambers leading to the central tree. Passing through ginger chambers decorated in the devotionals of the various branches of the Buddhist tree, I entered the central chamber and saw the tree.

The base was wrapped in a gold sash with a Buddha-footprint under glass in front of the tree. I looked up. To my surprise, welling up from within my heart and into my eyes, the tree was glowing with a soft and golden light. Something inside opened, and I just broke down in uncontrollable waves of tears—flowing from my deepest aspiration. It was like a miracle; right here, someone really and truly did put an end to suffering. For the first time in my life, the aspiration of enlightenment was lit in my heart, a real possibility in this lifetime. Like a guiding light from some distant and unknowable infinity, that unattainable rainbow that is the aspiration of bodhicitta: to liberate all suffering.

In our Western culture, the idea of a living and breathing Spirit in Nature has a sort of passing and "new age" appeal; but to seriously consider what the Spirit in Nature implies, in terms of our place in things, stretches reason to the maximum. Most people seem to resist this notion at an unconscious level, with much gnashing of teeth, because to accept it is to die to ourselves:



Regress

we're simply not that important in the grand scheme. But in Bodhgaya I touched a tree, and that tree quite literally spoke to my heart, in a language that only my heart was capable of understanding. This tree was alive and aware. What evidence do I have to offer except what is my most deep and abiding value:

I am like a great and solid rock island in the middle of a coursing river; I only know the river that flows around me. But my ultimate destiny is down river beyond anything I've ever known, and that unknown is a fine and ungraspable light like a gaseous mist rising in the morning—entirely self-illuminated and utterly unknown.

So perhaps it is fitting that the Inca worshipped the Sun, the source of the light which has been—across the ages—the central “natural symbol” and metaphor of the mystic's heart. In my own life, the Lumen Naturae has comforted a heart alienated by a distant mother and a world alienated from itself; a man has to stand for and within something. Rain is falling outside, and the Christ statue above on the hill where the Sacsayhuamán ruins are situated is alight, a white and gleaming beacon with arms outstretched above the valley. It's quite a pleasant statue, less austere and encumbered by theism than many images of Christ—more natural like a bird in flight. It was here in the mornings that the priests of the Inca would raise their arms, palms stretched upwards, to receive the rays of the sun. Enough for today, tomorrow is a mystery with arms outstretched to receive it.



Dark-Window

2/21/2009 Cusco, Peru

*You fall into a hole,
but down in that hole
you find something shining
worth more than any amount
of money or silver.*

—J'allaludin Rumi

This morning I took off my shirt to discover that—somewhere amidst the fatigue, diarrhea, altitude sickness and nausea—I seem to have developed pectoral muscles and a six pack. Last night we finally realized that we were suffering from more moderate symptoms of *soroche*, (altitude sickness). Flying into Cusco earlier this month, I had taken the necessary precautions to avoid serious symptoms: rest and hydration. However, it kind of slipped my mind

that, between Machu Picchu and Cusco, we would be ascending almost 4000 feet. So I wasn't paying attention to hydration or rest.

In the evening I sat down with my new book, John Hemming's *The Conquest of the Inca*, and, after a couple of minutes of reading, noticed I was particularly mentally fatigued, to the point of actually being lightheaded. It definitely seems to get worse in the evening. My palms were a bit clammy, and I noticed my lips were quite parched. A little light bulb went off in my head: “huh, I have been having some weird sort of rolling nausea and headache waves today.” Furthermore, BOTH Gratefulbear and I were getting these most disheartening waves

of oscillating loneliness and depression; Gratefulbear described it as “you have loneliness on one shoulder, and depression on the other,” a most unpleasant effect. So I dropped a couple liters in one of the hydro-paks and started hydrating. The effect was clear and almost immediate; I gradually started feeling better. Having taken a bit of time away from the coca, I pulled some out and began chewing. I must say, hydration+coca is something of a miracle when it comes to altitude sickness; there seems to be a synergistic effect.

Within 20 minutes of beginning to chew coca again, a sensation like achey pressure-release developed in my chest. Imagine being tense and sore after a workout and then soaking in a nice hot tub, and all of your muscles just relax, that kind of achey-tension release but in the respiratory system. With each pressure release, I would need to urinate. It was a remarkable effect and the symptoms of the *sorroche* quickly subsided. I chewed periodically through the evening: chewing and then hydrating. After a certain amount of time passed between chews, I would feel the return of symptoms that progressively decreased in intensity with each chew. It was quite a lesson to connect with coca as a medicine for specific physical distress; I seem to have connected with coca in a more balanced and respectful way as a result. I wonder what is happening at the molecular level in this case.

Perhaps some of my mad ramblings and delirious visions have been the result of improper hydration, not to suggest they are any less meaningful. William Blake wrote that humanity’s core delusion was a belief in a body separate from soul and vice versa. I think what we often call “soul” is perhaps, in fact, an as-yet-hidden aspect and understanding of the material universe. Just how unknown it is, I think the most materialistic amongst us can come to appreciate. Nevertheless, it has always seemed to me that the often irrational and confounding vicissitudes of the heart, soul and psyche, have a truth and reality as compelling as anything understood according to the current state of our comprehension of the material universe. Gnosis/knowledge, then, truly becomes a function of revealing that which was hidden and unknown, a sort of light in infinite regress, with each revelation containing within it the seed of some future enlightenment—albeit in a veiled and phosphorescent form—and each successive seed then dissolving the fruition of the previous seeding and awakening.

Last time I was at an elevation this high was in Nepal, ascending to an altitude just shy of 18,000 feet. It was a trek and we ascended slowly, not nearly so quickly as ascending 4000 feet by train or plane. Nepal is a rare gem of a country, the great gateway of the Himalayan mountain range. After a sweltering week in the urban hell that is Mumbai, our flight to Kathmandu arched the Western coast of India with a stopover in Dehli. We were projected to arrive in the evening, controlling for the roaring chaos that is India. Our plane left the gate in Dehli with everything in order. In transit from the gate to the runway, the pilot comes over the intercom: “we have to turn around to address mechanical problems,” so me and my traveling partner—an anal-retentive but entirely likeable Long Island native—spent a restless night staring at each other in the New Dehli Airport. Around 3 a.m., our flight was okay’d, and we embarked for Nepal.

Our plane arrived into the Kathmandu Valley just as the sun peaked over the horizon from the west. As we descended, the rays of the sun illuminated the rippling and white tips of the Himalayan mountain range in soft and pink light effervescing into a soft gold. Sweeping across the entire valley, our plane descended into a cradle of gentle and golden green. Even as recently as 2000, Kathmandu was a special place, a rare urban center in the modern age that maintains soul and character. The central tourist zone is your typical labyrinth of commerce

and craft. South and hugging the river is the Hindu temple at Pashupatinath, ornately complex in the Indo-Aryan style with an active Kali temple where animal sacrifice is still practiced. Small wooden huts line the river up and down, home to the many saddhus that populate the temple and its surroundings. Mud-covered, and always with their chillums, the saddhus of India and Nepal are invariably swathed in a cloud of cannabis smoke. It seems to be one of the finer points missed by Spandexed yoga enthusiasts of the West that yoga and the Vedic philosophy in its native form is basically an elaborate and ornate cannabis cult. Certainly cannabis is a likely candidate for the spectrum of plants—several seem likely as part of an evolving plant-man complex—that formed the evolving Soma complex of the ancient Vedas across India and the Middle East.

Crossing the river lies the white and rotund stupa at Swayambhunath, a home for Tibetan peoples in exile. As the sun sets in the evening, pilgrims and residents circumambulate the stupa in prayer; quite a remarkable scene of good will and camaraderie. The Tibetan people are genuinely kind for the most part, exclaiming “*tashi delek*” in greeting as one ascends the great mountain. As the story goes, the wild Bon of the Tibetan plateau were tamed by the lotus guru and father of Tibetan Buddhism: Padmasambavha. Sitting in the afternoons as the sun set, and watching so many smiling and sun-parched faces of the Tibetan plateau, was always heart warming to me. Years later, I was regaled by a story Terence McKenna told of DMT-induced

psychoplasmic vaginal holofluids on one of the roofs surrounding the temple at Boudanath.

But the Himalayas are the heart of Nepal, and our path took us around the great and towering Annapurna massif: 130 miles of man and nature. We climbed slowly, passing into the Kali Gandaki River Valley, resting and acclimating at 15,000 feet in the high desert-plateau village of Manang. The first day I heard tell that it was a day’s walk away to the base of the 8000-plus-meter Gangapurna peak. Somewhat tired of the constant worrying of my traveling companion, our Nepali porter Heera and I slipped out one morning to find the hermit’s cave.

As we ascended the stone-strewn slope, my sandaled traveling companion transformed into something of a high mountain ballerina, skipping ahead and thoroughly enjoying himself.

Before I knew it, he had “left me in the



Waterfall

dust.” I trudged along with the expectation of seeing our destination over each and every hill as we approached the mountain base. After awhile I became completely exhausted, with no sight of my hiking companion. Entirely spent, I flopped my backpack around behind me and

collapsed onto the ground. Opening my eyes, I gazed out into the immensity of the Kali Gandaki River Valley, perhaps 16,000 feet and completely alone. It was like a shot of DMT, suddenly I became aware of an immense and resonant ringing sound; the mountain was quite literally singing, it had a tone to it. I melted into the sound, merging with the very ancient soul of the mountain. I lost all sense of time and space as disparate phenomenon. It was one of those rare and abiding encounters with the very heart of the world.

Eventually I got up in a haze of excitement, spurred on by the beauty of my surroundings, and the profundity of what I had just experienced. I made my way over the next hill and we were at the very base of Gangapurna, crowned with an immense and glowing glacier. My traveling companion was sitting on a rock looking up at Gangapurna, with an extraordinary and knowing smile on his face. I sat down next to him and pulled out the two Mars Bars I had brought that day. I gave him his, and opened mine up. It was perhaps the most amazing thing I've ever eaten; we both chewed silently for a couple of minutes and then my companion exclaimed with a grunt "MMMMM!!!" It was perfect communication from the heart and gut level, and we both proceeded to break down into the most irrational fits of laughter, to the point of tears. Across worlds and languages, we somehow understood and recognized one another. We never found the hermit's cave, but in the solitude of that moment alone on the face of the great mountain, I found something shining.

I looked into plane tickets to Iquitos, which connect through Lima; more expensive than I was hoping. In fact, the flight to Iquitos will end up costing as much as our flight to Lima from the United States. So it seems we will bus to Arequipa-Puno, visit the Colca Canyon (and hopefully see a condor), Lake Titicaca and perhaps hit up Bolivia before heading back to Lima and catching a flight from there to Iquitos. From Iquitos, my work with ayahuasca begins.

For all the myriad of psychedelics and psychoactives I have sampled from A to Z to 2-C-Special G, I have never once imbibed the vine of the soul, nor any of the traditional DMT-enriched plant admixtures of the ayahuasca complex. My fascination with ayahuasca began at the age of 14. Having been exposed to the world of dimethyltyptamine through the rabbinical ramblings of the inimitable Terence McKenna, my initial exposure to the visionary vistas of ayahuasca came through the inspired visual poetry of Pablo Amaringo. At the age of 14, I promised myself that I would wait until I was in the Amazon jungle itself before taking ayahuasca. Now, sixteen years later, here I am, within striking distance of the jungle and that very vine which connects our world with the Other.

What Jung termed the "duality of the archetype of the mother" is expressed in the shamanic-mystical worldview as the two worlds. This world, which we perceive through the doorway of the senses, is bound by those very laws which govern the structure and function of the very sense organs through which this world is perceived. William Blake termed humanity's obsessive and myopic fixation on this domain of perception as the world seen through "narrow chinks of the cavern." The essential initiatory crises of the neophyte seeking induction into the expanded domain of the Other World involves what William Blake termed the "infernal method," a stripping away of life, death, and the world as he knows it. Mircea Eliade describes a similar process in the "skeletonization" of the shaman.

New Year's Eve 1998/1999: a small group of us gathered for a night of exploration. More than a little naïve at the time, my usage of psychedelics could be best described as irresponsible, if not downright reckless. By far the youngest of the group, I must have come off as awkward in a pubescent sense. I was lost and confused, desperately seeking something which

was, in retrospect, inevitable. My flight arrived from Albuquerque and, without any delay, the table was set and dinner served. The first course: dipropyltryptamine.

The first two doses weren't particularly memorable at 30 and 40 mgs apiece. Blue and purple hallucinations, warm and rolling with a vibrating and physical current lifting from the sacrum area. When the third dose was upon us, I asked our physician in residence: "how about 50?" I'll never forget my dear friend's response: "no, I think you need 60." Sometimes you get what you ask for; sometimes you get what you need. As the trance surged, the physical wave began to expand in amplitude until the entirety of my consciousness seemed wholly encompassed—and compressed—within this wave. There was a sense of the wave "bottoming out," at a point where the derivative of the curve is locally undefined. It was like flickering, and my mind seemed to be toggling in and out of consciousness very rapidly. I became quite anxious. Then, embedded within the wave at the "zero point," a current coursed through me from some other shore, a consuming wave of fire. I came to in another world altogether.

I was in the middle of a circle of beings of light. Their gaze was terrifyingly still, swimming with filigrees of flaming and wheeling galaxies in their eyes. There was a central being, like a priest; initially I conceptualized this being as either Christ, or Satan, lord of the underworld. In his hands was a bowl, which he was extending out to me. I looked down at my hands.

Over the years, I have discovered that while many people have a sort of fascination with psychedelics and the human relationship with drugs both plant-based and synthetic, very few people seem to connect with the psychedelic teachers at the visionary level. It's just too much. More often than not, people generally seem to toy around a bit with the psychedelics—just enough to have fun but not so much as to challenge their essential worldview. Generally then, the psychedelics are integrated into the ego-cocoon and become part of the reflexive unconsciousness of the self-focused state. My observation has been that—at this point—psychedelic experience is passed up for less consciousness-expanding fare such as alcohol. In fact, I have known entire subcultures within the psychedelic scene that devolve to this point and then become collectively locked into the participation mystique of the group consciousness, in a way that I can only describe as cultish. The collective force of this strictured and limited state of consciousness then takes on a life of its own, maintaining its homeostasis at all costs. Discussions become limited to only those topics—and modes of expression—which reinforce and maintain the cocoon of the devolved state of consciousness. Jung aptly described this state as "collectively unconscious."

When I looked down at my hands, I see that through my wrists on both sides were—clear as day—puncture wounds all the way through. It's almost impossible to describe hallucinations/visions of this nature, but this was entirely indistinguishable from the reality that I am experiencing as I sit here right now. This was as real as anything I have ever experienced—I could see it in full detail, could touch



Stone

it, smell it, hear it. “No, no” I kept repeating, for I was absolutely sure beyond any shadow of a doubt that I had really and truly “done it this time.” Years later, I came across a very similar description of initiation in Jung’s *Alchemical Studies*, where he discusses the visions of the Greek Gnostic Zosimos.

I looked up into the icy, formless eyes of the central priest, begging for some sort of salvation. The circle of beings scoffed; communication was telepathic. “How dare you come to us like a beggar,” the central priest beckoned towards the bowl. “Pray you fool—this is the hour of your death.” It was absolutely terrifying, in the most primeval way—there was simply no escaping this horror. Not only was I going to die, I was going to experience the most profound mortifications of the soul. I looked down at my body. There was blood everywhere: on my pants, on my face, all over my shirt. Then my flesh began to rot, bloated with bacteria and swimming with disease. “If you will not pray, then I will pray for you” came from the eyes of the central priest.

He then reached for my hand and, by some peculiar manipulation of the physical plane, he removed it and put it into the bowl. Then the other hand, then my arms, then he stripped the flesh from my chest, and removed all of the organs. Everything went into this bowl, swimming with some manner of fluid. Legs, everything, until only my head remained—then, stripping the flesh from my skull, he cracked open the top of my head. The last thing I remembered was staring at my fleshless skull as it floated in empty space, then a crushing pressure and complete oblivion. I remember looking at the priest, into his flaming eyes. “I must go now,” and, in one terrible instant, the candle went out and he turned his back on me.

I came to in a sort of blissful haze of unknowing, uncertain as to how I had survived the experience, but feeling very solid. It must have been quite unpleasant for the people around me to witness this, as I had no connection to the world. Over the next several years, and largely as a result of this experience, my life completely fell to pieces. I dropped out of school, traveled to India. Things truly were never the same for me. I’m still picking up the pieces.

Over the years, I have listened as various “seekers” parrot an argument that Thomas Mann made in response to Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*. Mann argued that the spiritual journey is like a mountain that we climb, and psychedelics are like taking the tramway to the top—they’re a shortcut. When I think about this particular experience, and just how challenging the psychedelic path has been for me . . . “shortcut, my ass” I conclude. Embedded within Mann’s metaphor and argument are several misconceptions, not the least of which is the myth of enlightenment as an attainment. But Mann also turns a blind eye to the original purpose and function of psychedelics in their native setting—psychedelics heal. As such, psychedelics can become an authentic path in their own right, as part of the aspiration to relieve suffering or what the Mahayanists call bodhicitta. While I cannot ascribe to a metaphysical philosophy of absolute moral relativism, many of the moral arguments against the use of psychedelics don’t seem to take into account the very necessity that informs their use. The Mazatec of Mexico use the mushroom because they can’t afford expensive pharmaceuticals. The Native American Church uses peyote as a way of enduring their often marginalized place in American society. Much of my travel and effort has been about contacting psychedelics within the matrix of this necessity: to heal.

The peyote shaman Don Jose “Matsuwa” received his shamanic vocation after losing his arm in a farming accident. He lived to be 110 years old. In his latter life, he observed: “The shaman’s path is unending. I am an old, old man and still a baby, standing before the mystery

of the world, filled with awe.”

The news of my mother’s death was entirely shocking. When I first heard, it was like swimming in a dream. There was part of me that simply did not believe it. The reality of losing someone close, and particularly one’s mother, dawns slowly over years, or it did for me. The fallout from her death was difficult, with the entire family jockeying for her possessions. She expressed her love through money and material possessions, and we all wanted a piece of her love.

She died during my last week in basic training, and my heart broke. I had lost my way in joining the army and, one afternoon as I looked at myself and saw the path I was walking unfold in the mirror, I went utterly and completely absent without leave. It was an incredibly difficult time, and but for the support and guidance of certain close friends as well as my life partner, I might not have made it through at all. I took up cigarettes, hiding out in the various rundown motels along Route 66 in Gallup, New Mexico. Several weeks prior to joining the army, I had watched George W. Bush, Jr. win his second term in office from *The American*, a dingy rundown “glah’nii” (alcoholic) bar in downtown Gallup. The next morning, I went for a long and hung over hike up into the Red Rocks canyon on the northeast end of Gallup. Feeling somewhat hopeless—as I’m sure many of us felt then—I sat down and grabbed in my fist a handful of dirt. The warm and solid earth was reassuring, and something said to me “everything will be ok.”

I was living in the Ford Explorer that I had bought with the \$2000 that was supposed to get me through the last of the semester. With four weeks left in the semester, and my lowest exam grade a 97% in Physics, I once again dropped out. I had watched as my mother and brother descended into an awful spiral of opiate, benzodiazapine and alcohol addiction. At a certain point, my brother began exhibiting psychotic-type symptoms. I remember one day finding him in the garage, slinging the Tupperware against the garage door because he “liked the sound.”

My mother was not well from the time I returned from India until her death. You never imagine you will lose someone so suddenly. Had I known what was going to happen, I would have done a lot of things differently. The finality of death is a profound teacher; it teaches one how to live. On my return from India, and after a short stint in the San Diego area, I returned to New Mexico and briefly lived with my mother. During my time away, she had gone through an ugly divorce, with my brother in the middle of it. My brother suffered from the notion that it was somehow his duty to “protect” my mother from negative influences in her life, including the men with whom she was intimately related. Over the years, this dynamic developed into a co-dependency with immense and blinding gravity.

Initially my stay was somewhat pleasant, but after awhile things began to devolve quickly. While I was gone, they had purchased a female akita. Certainly cute as a puppy, this female had become as an adult quite large and aggressive. My mother and brother weren’t capable of taking care of themselves, much less a full grown and territorial akita. Their lifestyle had become quite isolated; for example, they wouldn’t allow me to cook for fear of the dishes getting dirty. The simple activities of living had become a threat to their insular lifestyle. Both my mother and brother would lock themselves in their room, shutting the blinds to all outside light, and drift off into their own world. As a result, the akita was never properly socialized. I kept telling them that the akita was a liability, and so I became the “bad guy” as a result. One day while my mother was away, the akita decided to make tatters of my hand—quite a

frightening experience.

The density of their co-dependency was extraordinary and, try as I might, I simply couldn't break through their shell. I began distancing myself from the situation, and spending a great deal of time at the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe. After commuting back and forth between Albuquerque and Santa Fe several times a week for the daily meditation and work schedule, they offered to let me stay overnights in exchange for work. I enjoyed the work itself—weeding, painting, sweeping. One day, the office folks pulled me aside and said: “we really appreciate your quality of work.” I seem to work best when there is no sense of compensation involved; perhaps I would do well in not-for-profit work.



Away

During this time, the stale and bloated war rhetoric of the Bush regime was ramping up in full force with all eyes on Iraq. The decision had been made, and Bush's State of the Union address was eye opening as a technicality in a war that was already foregone as a conclusion. Then Colin Powell presented what was quite obviously weak evidence alleging that Iran possessed weapons of mass destruction and harbored terrorists. I sat aghast as a very small group of insane politicians waged what will certainly go down as one of the most catastrophic and irresponsible military campaigns in American history. My paternal family, conservative to the core, proudly waved the banner of bloodthirsty American hysteria that swept our country in the first decade of the third millennium.

A week prior to the first wave of the Iraqi invasion, the resident teacher at Upaya, Roshi Joan Halifax—who had been part of the initial wave of psychedelic research in the early 60s—addressed the war directly.

“When I was first involved in spiritual practice during the time of the Vietnam War, one of the big questions we struggled with was our role as practitioners. How involved do we get? We learned a lot from the Quakers during this time. So, I ask you all now: what is our role in this war? What is your role in this war? As practitioners of peace, how can you know peace

in an environment of war?”

I have thought about—and meditated—on this a lot, and here’s how I feel. I will absolutely NOT allow my one central and abiding conviction in the healing power of compassion to be desecrated and trampled upon.”

Over the years, I have reflected ever more deeply on her words, for they were spoken from a truth that penetrated into my very bones. She closed her talk and we recited the Bodhisattva vows: “When you recite this vow, take it to heart. What does it truly mean to ‘embody compassion’ with your entire being?” We recited: “delusions are infinite—I vow to exhaust them. Beings are limitless—I vow to liberate them. The way of compassion is unattainable—I vow to embody it,’ and so on.

After the chant, she slipped into the small foyer adjacent to the small meditation room beneath Roshi’s living quarters. The temple head, a young and clear-eyed French woman, delivered the weekly announcements. As I listened, I became vaguely aware of Roshi’s presence to my right and slowly turned my head. She kind of hopped out at me, looked into my eyes directly. I saw her body in one sweeping gestalt of perception. Her clasped hands opened, grabbing the front seam of her robe and pulling it back slightly. She smiled at me and, sewn into the creases of her face, the delicate way she lovingly adjusted her robe and carried her body: the light of loving kindness. It was palpable, I could see it with my eyes and feel it with my heart as we gazed face to face and eye to eye. I stumbled out of the temple and sat as waves of tears poured out. Sometimes you manage to peek your head up over the endless ocean of suffering, and see just how difficult life can be. In essence, she showed me what it was to embody compassion.

Things with my mother continued to degenerate. One evening as I was staining the wood over the entrance of the main temple at Upaya, a feeling crept in to my heart telling me “you need to go see your mother.” I left the job half-finished and rushed home. During this time, while my mother was still using opiates and benzodiazapenes. She had for a short period given up alcohol. By the time I got back home, she was significantly intoxicated. Her friend John—a Cordon Bleu-trained chef—was visiting from Colorado, and certainly the “toxic nostalgia” of the old days must have eclipsed her best intentions. John, somewhat rotund, greeted me enthusiastically, face pink and flush with the warm oblivion of alcohol intoxication. He cared for my mother in a certain sense, and was fairly charming in a good ol’ boy kind of way. I didn’t dislike him, though he was certainly one of the affairs that my mother had during her third marriage. He liked to drink, and he and my mother shared many fond memories of drunken weekends in Las Vegas. He was cooking the most disgusting pork dish I’ve ever seen, dense and dripping in animal cholesterol. With him was a friend, no more than a couple years older than me. I decided to check-in for the evening, with the hopes of returning to Upaya early the next morning.

Several years prior, in Thailand, I had the following lucid dream: I’m standing in my mother’s kitchen, and awaken to the fact that not only am I dreaming but I have complete control over what it is that I dream. Having traveled for seven months at that point, and having been utterly sex deprived, my first inclination is to weave a woman. Naturally then, we’ll have sex and it will be wonderful. So I set to work weaving this woman out of rainbow and light. Everything is going fine to the point that I actually complete the creation, at which point it takes on a life of its own. I go to embrace the woman I’ve created and she slips from my reach, receding into a space of infinite regress. I pursue her, over mountains and down valleys,

traversing rivers, crossing jungles and the dark desert nights. Eventually I find myself in a sort of broke down war zone, littered with the remnants of bombed-out buildings. There's a spiral staircase and I'm descending in circles, hoping to corner her. I circle the last corner, and there is a woman there, but she is different from the woman I initially created. Her face is pale, her eyes sunken, and there is a sort of preternatural and pale light over her. Her mouth is wide open; I collapse into her as she begins performing oral sex. As I fall into her, I look onto the ground and, illuminated like runes in moonlight, is a single word: *Prophecy*. I awoke with the intuitive sense that my life partner was going to be a twin; there was a twin-complex embedded within the dream.

So I lie down, and try and sleep with the hopes of leaving early the next morning. The party in the kitchen gets louder and louder, and then they seem to move upstairs. Someone has turned the music up full blast. Frustrated, I walk across the dining room to the kitchen area to tell them to quiet it down. I walk into the room, and my mother is on the other side of the kitchen performing oral sex on the young man who had accompanied John. Everything went downhill from there for my mother and me. While she did love and care about me in her own way, she was just so ashamed about so much of her life. I moved out within a week and found a place near the University. The last time I saw my mother was Valentine's Day 2003. My life partner—indeed a twin— and I visited her with a great stuffed bear (my partner's totem is the bear) and flowers. My mother was so ashamed of her obesity at the time that she wouldn't let Gratefulbear in to see her. Gratefulbear never met her. She died the next year of a cardiomyopathy, the result of her obesity.

Much of my psychology has been conditioned by this imprint of the consuming mother—my tendency to connect disparate phenomenon, to place special emphasis on synchronistic and pre-cognitive phenomenon. These things are for me a sort of tight knit blanket which weave me into a sense of the planetary and cosmic mother. These phenomenon are not so much unique manifestations of my own giftedness as something I seek out from the necessity of the condition I find myself in: orphanhood.

Years later, in the wake of her death, I'm chain-smoking American Spirits in a run-down motel off route 66 in Gallup. Very much alone, and constantly watchful, my days are spent in anticipation of the worst possible outcome: jail, a dishonorable discharge. In 2005, and in spite of the wartime, one real loophole existed for getting out of the army. Much of one's chances for actually getting out rested on whether or not it was worth it for your company to pursue a long and costly court martial. For most soldiers in the early part of their training, it's simply not worth it for the army to prosecute. One goes AWOL and avoids—at all costs—getting wrangled by the US Marshalls commissioned with the task of capturing AWOL soldiers. At this point, you simply bide your time until you are DFR'd (dropped from the rolls). This is supposed to occur on the thirtieth day you are absent, but sometimes they hold onto your file longer so that when you turn yourself in, they simply send you back to your company. So you routinely check with Fort Knox and, when you are officially dropped from the rolls, you turn yourself in at one of two places for outprocessing: Forts Knox or Sill. From what I had read, Knox had a tendency to keep people around for a long time, whereas Sill routinely outprocessed people in a week or less.

So I mostly just bided my time, waiting to turn myself in and expecting the worst. This one morning, I'm really down and depressed, flipping through one of the cheap tourist catalogues left in my motel room. I turn the page, and there's a most extraordinary black-

and-white photograph of the Santa Fe artist Georgia O'Keefe, taken by her husband Alfred Stieglitz. Something in my heart responded to the image, and there was a sense that everything would work out fine. Beneath the image, there was text in O'Keefe's own words: "Nobody sees a flower really because to see takes time, like having a friend takes time. We simply don't have the time." There was a sense of reconnecting with a sense of beauty and meaning. I have always been amazed at how simple these openings can be. There's a knock on the door, and a Navajo man with a rattle outstretched—an older style Navajo rattle made from a gourd. "Four dollars, man?" I reach in my pocket—I have exactly four dollars. Every time I use that rattle, which has become an instrument of unusual power for me over the years, I reflect on that sense of beauty in simple things. I was outprocessed in a week without hitch, closing the door on a particularly difficult chapter of my life.



Time-Space

Rose and the nightingale tambo bell lost in the fragrance
—J'alalludin Rumi

2/22/2009 Cusco, Peru

*But my dreams
aren't as empty
as my conscience seems to be*
—The Who, "Behind Blue Eyes," 1971.

I slept almost 13 hours last night. I guess I needed it. My dreams were rapid and mundane, a clear case of REM-rebound. I seem to be dreaming a great deal about my brother, for whatever reason. We have been resting, though the both of us are ready for another journey into the unknown. We have considered working with a local San Pedro shaman, but I don't feel particularly called to San Pedro here in Cusco. Perhaps in its native region, in and around Trujillo in the northern part of the country, I will feel more of a pull.

Trujillo itself interests me greatly, as the source of the famed "Trujillo coca." The novogranatense species of the *Erythroxylum* genus, Trujillo coca is said to contain quantities of methyl salicylate, which imparts to the coca a sort of minty flavor. Novogranatense is unique in the sense that while *E. coca* is capable of self-germination, novogranatense lacks the proper morphological structures for self-germination. I find this interesting bit of botanical data especially intriguing in light of the Kogi mythologem which describes the cosmic genesis as

an act of self-germination. In fact, the Kogi actively cultivate only the novogranatense form of coca, its E. coca relative occurring predominately farther to the south with a morphology that suggests a natural and uncultivated source. Perhaps, then, their mythologem tells something of the story of how coca came into human cultivation.

Apparently the majority of Trujillo coca is exported to the United States, stripped of its cocaine—which is then marketed for medical use—and used to flavor Coca-Cola (the sole licensed American importer is Mallinckrodt of St. Louis, Missouri). Of further interest, the area around Trujillo seems to be the headwaters of *Huachuma*/*T. Pachanoi* shamanism, certainly one of the most ancient of the new world shamanic forms. Cactus truly has been a powerful ally over the years, especially good for facilitating human bonding and clearing the heart.

This last summer, I spent a fair amount of time at the Wounded Knee reservation in South Dakota. Generally recognized as the most impoverished place—per capita—in the United States, the unemployment rate hangs somewhere around 80% on the reservation. Wounded Knee and Rosebud are the wild, wild west. I remember one day we went out searching for a pair of horses belonging to a young Lakota we'd befriended. Sometime in the early morning, a group of rowdy Lakota boys had stolen the horses, and were seen leading them away from the central, government housing facility at the center of Wounded Knee. I guess horse stealing is still a problem. We journeyed to Wounded Knee to learn the peyote way of the Native American Church, as well as to explore the Lakota tradition in its own right.

I drove from Albuquerque to Austin, a 12-hour plunge into the heart of Bush country: "Welcome to Texas, the home of President George W. Bush Jr." "Wonderful," I'm thinking.

That first night in Austin it thundered and poured. When the rain cleared, all was silent except a single owl, calling out into the night. Twenty-eight hours of driving and four states later we pulled into Wounded Knee, a blanket of rolling and green hills. Our hosts, the Lakota spiritual leader Richard "Who Has the Foundation" Swallow and his wife Bonnie, warmly welcomed us into their simple trailer home. My companion took the bed and I took a cot in the living room. Richard wore a black cowboy hat, Ray-Bans, and beaded bracelets matching his dark-blue button-up T-shirt, which was decorated with a orange lighting bolt design. No sooner had we sat down, when he looked me in the eye and bluntly asked, "So, let me ask you a question: how far have you gone with the medicine?"

"Not as far as I would like," I replied.

Over the next six hours, he told story after story: the medicine wheel, his lineage, stories from the 1970 military occupation at Wounded Knee. He took a specifically controversial stance on the medicine wheel, describing it as a mandala of the races. As a result, his particular perspective on the medicine wheel was particularly inclusive. "But the real medicine is beyond this wheel," he would say.

He suffered from diabetes, having lost his toes to amputation. Yet he smoked cigarettes and drank Coca-Cola unapologetically, which caused him occasionally to become a bit loopy.

"Can you sing?" he asked the first night.

"No, but I'd like to learn," I replied.

He regaled us with some of the older peyote songs, sung in a soft and lilting way. As we came to discover, peyote songs in their current inception on the Lakota rez are sung behind a rapid and beating drum, with a great deal of gusto and bravado. It's very intense and somewhat macho. Richard was of an older form, gentle in his singing, and partial to the "half-moon" style of the peyote ceremony. Tamed by age, he shared stories of his "wilder days," drinking

and fighting. We learned how to tie the water drum, and were walked through the Lakota cosmology and genesis. Lakota mythology describe a great flood brought on by the iniquity of mankind. In this flood, the world is conceived of as a great wheel that is inverted and submerged in primordial water. The re-creation of the world involves a great tree to the north, in whose branches the White Buffalo maiden is placed by the Eagle People. From the wood of the branches of this world tree comes the mouthpiece of the Chanunpa, the sacred pipe which acts as medium between the two worlds. The bowl of the pipe is carved from a specific quarry of red stone in Minnesota, considered sacred to the Lakota. The stone represents the “Blood of the Mother.” As the story goes, the White Buffalo maiden appeared to two hunters—twins—as they returned home from the hunt. The first brother, overtaken by his lust for her beauty, resolves to take her then and there, ignoring the warnings of the second brother who said, “this woman is sacred.”

When the first brother tries to seize her, a bolt of lightning reduces him to a skeleton. “Go to your people and build for me a lodge,” she asks of the terrified second brother. “I come bearing a sacred gift.” So was gifted the first Chanunpa Pipe to the Lakota, an instrument of communication with the Other World. To the pipe are affixed two eagle feathers, representing the twins who first set eyes on the White Buffalo maiden. The far tip of the pipestone bowl is angled, in remembrance of the Lakota equivalent of “the fall.”

One night we shared dinner with a fellow roadman of the Church, a thin man with wild hair and clear eyes. “One thing you will see about Lakota people is they have this Spirit,” he said with a weathered accent. “This Spirit, it makes them tough. Lakota people are really tough. You can’t have this Spirit, white men don’t know about it.” I took the silver and turquoise bracelet off my wrist, and slid it across the table. “That line of turquoise is the river. The triangles are the mountain. Underneath are the insignia of the clans of the Dine. My fiancée is Dine. I want you to have this,” and I handed him the bracelet. Taking the bracelet, he smiled and put it on. We ate silently for a couple of minutes, and then he looked up. “Maybe you can have this Spirit. You might be able to have it.”

We built Richard a sweat lodge, replacing the one damaged from snow the previous winter. The sweat lodge is formed according a specific design. Traditionally, twelve stalks of willow are strung together in a circle and anchored by three willow hoops that circle the structure. The door and fireplace face north, with the Lakota altar between the door and fireplace. Once the Chanunpa-pipe is placed on the altar, one does not cross the line between the altar and the door of the lodge. Instead, you circle clockwise and enter the lodge from the right side. “A day will come when each and every person all the way down to the drunk man in the gutter will receive his revelation, and it will be like pouring, pouring from the sky,” Richard said one evening

My first sweat lodge experience was on the Wounded Knee reservation, four rounds of prayer. As the intense steam singed my back, I hugged the earth closely and prayed. I prayed for my father and brother, for a solution to all of our family problems. I prayed for the sick wife of a close friend, I prayed for my family, my wife. We prayed for Richard’s health, and the well being of his family. We expressed our gratitude for friendship. Something about the dark and damp inferno of the sweat lodge truly builds a sense of filial hood and closeness, I found myself being quite honest. During the fourth round, the Chanunpa-pipe was handed around and we smoked. When the pipe reached me, I prayed for my father and took of the pipe. As I smoked, I sensed a soft and golden light from the top of the lodge. It grew in intensity—there

was a tinge of purple and it was pouring over me. “Everything will be fine,” it told me.

Afterwards we lay on the ground, naked except for our underwear, gazing up into star-strewn space. Richard pointed to the Big Dipper: “See, it’s like I said. It’s pouring.”

We were silent. That night, I slept wonderfully.

The next evening, I had my first ceremony with the Native American Church. We brought some of our own medicine—fresh peyote buttons—and ingested several before stepping into the lodge. This was a birthday celebration, for twin daughters of one of Richard’s nephews. Richard grabbed my hand, setting me down next to him as my traveling companion slipped across to the opposite end of the tipi. The peyote went around several times, a damp paste concocted from dried peyote powder. I took several spoonfuls and washed it down with peyote tea.

What struck me that night was less the effect of the peyote—which was indeed plenty strong—and more the attitude of reverence and venerable respect afforded this particular medicine by the people sitting circle. The woman next to me, wrapped in a blanket covering a thick, black leather biker jacket, wept all night. Occasionally her head would peak above the blanket. Her hair pulled back by a red sash, her worn and tear-stained face was the spitting image of the one and very “tough Spirit” I had been told of. The staff went around in circles all night long, song after song. At a certain point, Richard placed his eagle feather fan in my hands: “Here, hold this.”

In the peyote warmth, delicate tendrils like webbing seemed to radiate outwards from the tips of each feather. “It’s a song-catcher. Songs are like spirits,” he said.

But I had no songs, passing the staff on with every round. The only gringo in the circle—my traveling partner was part Mexica—I felt occasionally self-conscious and compelled to simply keep my head down. An hour or two before sunrise, one of the elder women on the opposite side took the staff and stood up. Turning to her son—who had been sitting to the right of her and occasionally lasciviously eyeing me across the fire during the night—she passionately and openly castigated him for his alcoholism, body quivering with tears.

“When my grandfather freed the peyote from deadwood, he took that peyote to my grandmother who was in the hospital sick. They thought she was incurable, but he gave her the peyote and she walked out of the hospital that very day. I truly believe in these peyote ways. These peyote ways are the one thing the washicu has not taken from us. They are sacred. But that alcohol you are using, it’s only destructive, it only destroys.”

Her passion and sincerity was profound, and I was amazed at how the peyote lodge created a circle whereby such sensitive and painful material could be openly discussed in a supportive atmosphere. Her son listened, and then began crying. Everyone in the circle nodded in approval.

In the night, I heard an owl circling the tipi. Richard was in and out of consciousness throughout, clearly weakened by his diabetes. In the morning, he opened his eyes and grinned at me—“so you made it”—he was very much still there.

Our last night, Richard gifted us eagle feathers. Two I then gifted to good friends, and one—a wing-tip golden eagle feather—I kept for myself. On several occasions, Richard connected the “Eagle People” with aliens and the UFO phenomenon. He related an experience during one of his Vision Quests at Bear Butte. There was a stone before him during his fast, and he looked up in the sky to see that the stone was also in the sky. From the sky-stone came a beam of light like a bolt of lightning that shattered the earth stone before him. “The stone

was shattered, in many pieces. Then the stone came back together, and I saw that this was how Christ walked on the water, he used these stepping stones.”

It was a very peculiar story, rife with alchemical and alien metaphors that reminded me of the whole constellation of dismemberment motifs in shamanic and Egyptian mythologies.

Several weeks later I returned home to New Mexico, having driven a total of 96 hours by the time I made it home. It was good to see Gratefulbear, and we made passionate love that night. Exhausted, I brought back with me a decent sized bag of peyote, perhaps 120 fresh buttons. Several I planted, many were eaten.

My third day back, Gratefulbear became visibly sad in the early part of the day, eyes turned downward with a look of loneliness. Something was clearly bothering her, and I suspected she was missing her deceased mother, though we didn't discuss it. One thing I have come to appreciate about Navajo women is their aptitude for silence. When I first met Gratefulbear, her silence confounded me to no end. In time, I learned to respect and appreciate the beauty of her silence.

I first met Gratefulbear shortly after returning to New Mexico after a short stint in San Diego. We were both working at Olive Garden at the time, and there was something incredibly alluring about her soft olive skin and demure presence. She was generally quiet, shy in a certain sense. Though clearly not of Anglo descent, it was several weeks before she told me her ethnicity. Earlier that month, I had taken my single largest dose of Mescaline HCl, 400mg including a supplementary dose of San Pedro juice. The experience was extraordinarily intense, with some of the most vivid and electrifying visuals I have ever been privy to. In fact, this was the last time I ever tripped with my brother, and it was perhaps the last time we saw eye to eye. At the peak of intensity, I become entirely confounded by the whole conundrum of the “insides and outsides” of things. For example, the activity of being “inside my clothing” was almost impossible to wrap my mind around. So, naturally, I took my clothing off, as did my brother. We ended up taking a bath in my mother's bathtub upstairs, having certainly regressed to a time when we shared a bathtub.

Eventually we ended up naked on the bed, very high. At a certain point, my brother must have realized how ridiculous we looked, as he went into the laundry and came back fully clothed. In his hand was a towel for me; black and elegant, it had an alien quality like Martian silk. Unfolding the towel in what looked to me like hyper-dimensional acrobatics, he then handed it to me: “put this on.”

I grabbed the towel, fascinated, and scrutinized its every surface. Then wrapping it around myself, it was like something unzipped from deep within me. It was very peculiar, and seemed to have something to do with my brother having given me this towel. The entire plane



Gratefulbear

of our physical being was wrapped in what I can only describe as an immense blue flame. We were nestled within this flame that between us was like a single intelligence. Words flowed effortlessly between us with the sense that what was being spoken was simultaneously and directly felt as flowing directly from this higher mind. At a certain point, we began laughing, everything was so naked and obvious. How could we have ever been confused?

Later that day, my brother and I went for a long walk on the golf course, the very place where we had grown up together for many years. The world was beautiful, everything was shining and we felt connected—connected to each other, connected to the world. It was on that walk I told him: “I will meet my life partner before the month is out.” Sure enough, at the end of that month, there she was. When she eventually told me her ethnicity—“I’m Navajo”—, something in my heart responded. There was a soft and glowing golden light around her, and I sensed to a life of the desert, herding sheep, and the welcoming firmness of desert sand. I was hooked, so to speak.

Several of the peyote songs are said to bring closer the spirits of dead relatives. We didn’t discuss what she was going through that day after my return from Wounded Knee, but I picked up the very rattle I had acquired while AWOL, and began to sing and pray. I prayed that the peyote would bring her in touch with her mother—in a way that would bring her peace. I prayed most of the morning, and then later that evening suggested we both partake of a large dose of peyote. We ate the buttons and settled in for the long, slow dawning of the inner sun that is peyote. I put together a make shift staff, to which I affixed the eagle feather. Holding the staff in my left hand, I shook the rattle in my right and sang, praying for Gratefulbear. At about the hour and a half point, Gratefulbear fell into a very peculiar sort of sleep. Entirely motionless, I continued singing and praying as she slept. As I sang and prayed, there was a faint and stirring wind that moved through the room. I knew what was happening as she slept there. She slept for perhaps an hour then awoke, eyes wide and looking mildly confused. By this time, we were firmly in the welcoming grips of the peyote. She didn’t say anything about what had happened for several hours—simply remaining silent—but I knew. She had seen her mother. My intention for this experience had not been discussed between the two of us; it was most unusual and healing for the both of us.

“I saw someone” she eventually uttered, and then later told me that she saw both her mother and the recently deceased father of a close friend.

To this day, she remains silent on the specifics. She has told me that she asked her mother three questions—one for each feather I say—but not what they were. I don’t press the subject; it was a healing she deeply needed and something very personal. I remain open to any and all explanations for these phenomena, but in my life they have a certain reality. There is a quality of mystery to such things, and for this reason the practice of “noble silence” is entirely suitable. Gratefulbear shares with me a sensitivity to such phenomenon, and the mescaline complex has played a significant role in the unfolding of our relationship. So perhaps in the region surrounding Trujillo, something will open up for us. We may walk up to the fortification complex up the hill at Sacsayhuamán this afternoon. This writing has been profoundly therapeutic for me. I feel like I’m somehow getting to know myself better.

To be continued in Cenacle | 70 | October 2009



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

(Fourth Series)

*"Why are we here? Because we're here.
Why does it happen? Because it happens.
Roll the bones. Roll the bones."
—Rush, "Roll the Bones," 1992.*

xxxi. *The Exchange*

[Jean-Baptiste Oudry, "Chienne allaitant ses petits,"
oil on canvas, 1754]

Four walls & a roof, a castle or hut,
the world will keep oncoming, slowly
& by surprise—oncoming til you leap
into it or let it take you—
& even then what reward? Oncoming,
til you feed it all, your tits, your pups,
the last of you & gone. The world takes back
what you borrowed, called a life.

xxxii. *What Lesson*

[Claude-Joseph Vernet, "Nuit,"
oil on canvas, 1760]

I was a man of reason until tonight,
a man of science, unmoved by the bricks
& icons & shrieking women of the church.
While on the sea I read the latest journals
& wrote letters to colleagues. But the dreams
of singing, when I would awake choking
on images of sea-water, & the moon,
how it shown brighter every night!

I did not become a man of God tonight,
 as it is said some do when they think
 their death's hour come. To the last, I try
 to understand. So close the land, yet sinking,
 not enough time to get us all to the lifeboats.
 Briefly wondered at the fire on that distant
 tower & I know the meaning of loneliness,
 what drove the ancients to conspire
 their punishing afterlife of flame.

But the moon—the full full moon!
 In & out of clouds it strides the sky,
 above the waves that drown us &
 the waves that sink our rescuers.
 The beauty of this world that had eluded
 my reason not in its moment of creation
 but in how hard it is to let go!

xxxii. After Museum

I love the hands that made the art,
 even the pieces I do not know &
 feel close. A sympathy between us,
 how impossible to be alive &
 not make something in response, & again!

xxxiv. Solitude in Park

Hunger passes in its thousand thousand flavors,
 the blooms that explain everything in their scents,
 if there was that right word for distant rhythms
 in colored shadows.

xxxv. *Americana*

[Albert Bierstadt, "The Trappers Camp,"
oil on academy board, 1861]

Only one of us had books in his bag,
& him only two: a bible & a journal.
The bible he'd get out on or near Sundays,
read us something with God & gore in it.
The other he'd write in from time to time.
For a believer, he hated preachers, said
the country's ideals would always tinge blood-red
if studied awhile. He loved the beauty in things,
trees, sunsets, the animals we took when
we could find them anymore. He said America
will always long for a king to make it right
between what we destroyed & the cosmos.
Said he knew an old soldier who limped
by a cane given him by a slave. A magic
stick for healing, carved in glyphs & animal symbols.
Ate the food I handed him & looked up
at the moon. "We all need a stick like that."

xxxvi. *Could It Be*

[Jackson Pollock, "Sea Change,"
oil & pebbles on canvas, 1947]

The theory goes: there is no center
to break nor edge to run over.
All goes on & on. Time neither recurring
nor beginning nor ending. All is,
continuously. Before, there is another
before; after, another after, & so on.

A blighted theory, some say, for we
men & women live mortal, come & go,
watch each other come & go, so praise
& mourn & mark our passing days.
This theory leaves us small, powerless,
our glories & decays less important.

An addendum to the theory reads:
 you will live forever, you will one day
 become that glaring violet sunset
 you watch tonight, & then you will be
 watched by another, & play his clue & key.

xxxvii. After a Day Away

Even wings have weight, cave the shoulders
 with the years. Flying pulls on gravity's dour
 fist, bends it unwilling loose by its own weakness.
 Singing will hoarse a throat & some will mutter
 that isn't any music. One man's sweat & craft
 will wrap another's dinner bones & he will lunge
 for the stinking truck to take it away.

xxxviii. Wistful

Now what. The ocean, some say, is turning
 an old, far color. Others begging in books
 for a burst in the world, a burst through
 the world. Some always beg.
 Others cluster around ideas of what men
 might do, feed the old demons a killing plate
 of machine & reason. Force God or just
 that hunger from its close fissure within.

This world is child, will take our strokes
 & smacks alike as due, rare protest enough
 to change men's rhythms. One day far
 from now, but there are many steps.
 This world is mother, offering us her
 beautiful songs, some cautions about
 poison plants in the heart, gravity,
 glowing eyes in evening canyons.

Men will ever rage & recede like their gods,
 & most will fall to earth unhearing
 the celestial hums or even the hard
 beautiful music in the freak thing of mortal lives,
 the rawness, the spasms, each a confession of
 what was & what almost was, each a song,
 & what goes when each is gone.

xxxix. The Trouble Was

The drinks in the motel bar were fun,
 she said so, she laughed, she finished
 his too, she wanted to fuck &
 when it was brutal she wanted more.
 In the morning she was still talking, laughing.

xl. City's Tale

In a night so many faces will pass &
 recede. A spilled drink, an apology,
 a laugh. When the lights go out in
 the tavern, someone knows how
 to imitate old movie actors. He
 does Bogey, Tracy, Groucho Marx.
 There was the sky too, today, tonight,
 the clouds thick, bubbling like eager
 flesh, crossing skies pink with life's
 deepest cries, & whatever it meant,
 whatever it was, "tell us about
 those clouds, Groucho, go on!"
 So many faces in the dark, listening,
 as Groucho says those clouds were
 damned pretty, like a girl in lipstick
 & a yellow skirt, & everyone laughs
 because it made sense, Groucho's
 clever, & the lights come up.

Everyone looks around, up at the TV
 & its game, at their phones, at their
 dates, at other people's dates. Nobody
 is saying who was Groucho in the
 dark & those clouds seem pretty
 far away again, whatever they were.

xli. Cafeteria Window

The poor girl in denim rags, her hair
 tails around her shoulders, her hair
 the soft color of rust, feeds her dog
 from a plastic cup, her dog a skinny
 handsome husky, I wonder what sympathy
 she would accept, what rose would not
 briefly crisp in her heart, or choke it
 in spines of mercy & lust. The avenue
 grows dark, her grubby companions laugh
 & smoke cigarettes, too many, tomorrow's
 another hustling day. She watches her dog
 eat, & gathers to go. (Your life has no center
 to break nor edge to run over. Tonight
 I will dream of your dog singing to you.)

xlii. Advice for the Hungry Girl

If you talk to more strangers
 your world will burst into hungrier
 hours.
 Your skies will fill with what
 strangers say.
 Your dreams will find colors
 plain & golden
 that you did not remember
 ago.
 If you talk—

xlili. Midnight's Question Again

Will you know that hour when it comes?
 Will it be a death? A break? A fall?
 And will you turn another way from your shadows,
 nod them off, finally, & now the untried road?

xliv. That Confession

What beauty passes stately by
 mixtures in me a carnal thought,
 what years gone in two or three
 steps, what fruit & flesh untasted,
 & how I rarely say the daring word
 any more than the slate faces I despise.

xlv. Thorns for Roses

How to exchange my heart's thorns
 for roses, pitch myself through murk
 to a tall, quiet sky, hear in every voice
 a flicker of its secret music, nod to
 its want, allow for what it alone knows
 even if we never speak. Allow for its
 truths, the fine tangles of its mysteries,
 & shape a prayer that many or some
 or at least one vital face will mourn
 its passing, still listen, hungry &
 believing, when this voice is no more.

xlvi. Philippic

Once, some say, there was common purpose,
 when there were fewer. The men killed the beasts,
 the women cooked the food & bred the children.
 Myths explained the suffering, what life gave,
 what it took, & why it then took more. If myths
 ever explained true, what did that man cry out & run?

xlvi. God Isn't Change . . .

Why did that first man cry out & run?
 Something, blood, sunshine, pleasures
 without words in private hours.
 Something, the disappointment in his
 laughing father's voice. The press of teachers
 for him to believe them, blindly, hungrily,
 believe like a slave in the mirror would.
 Newspapers with arguments for facts.
 Those private pleasures, touching, the voices,
 some of it dreaming, he never knew.

He ran. Someone would have come too.
 He knew that. He ran because he
 had to, & nobody had before, so he
 ran alone. Stole an icon from the temple,
 some thought to desecrate but, no,
 it was his god too, at least those first
 nights under stars.

They found the icon in a clearing,
 half-burnt, wrapped in an animal
 skin. He was not seen again, a story,
 a lesson, a warning that what cries
 in privatest hours wills each most to run.

xlvi. God is Cash Money

What life does not give—
 What cannot be taken—
 What outreaches coins—
 Staying moonlight, youth, weightless want—

Myths breathe by the men who believe,
 & expire when the last one falls.

xlix. Tonight I will Dream Your Dog is Singing to You

A slow revolution bides the world,
 beneath the mathematics, the wine,
 the cry of tall preachers to mingle nearer,
 the sham gurus with hallucinatory songs
 of end dates, tomes upon tomes liberating
 the cunt of obligation & ecstasy alike,
 a slow revolution, a smiling green pulse,
 neither leaf nor root. Touch a thing,
 call it a name, feel the power coming
 on, know it limitless, & you won't stop
 now, you'll never want to stop. Now again.

l. Persistence of Memory

There is no center to break nor edge
 to run over. There are two temples.
 There is the temple to joy.
 There is the temple to sorrow.
 Between them bides the human heart.
 Centuries go by, believers waver like grass
 between them. Some gird power,
 to take the center, some make wildly
 for the edge. But there are only
 two temples, to joy, to sorrow.

li. What's Coming & Gone

High on labyrinth, endless desert
to go. A body thirsting & hungering
to its last hour. What God could explain?

lii. Sacred Fragment

I ask the Universe: why suffering &
why its glorious songs? Three stone geese
in repose before a matron goddess, icon
to patience & mystery. Seen through a fence
whose rusted metal sign warns of dogs &
plague. Bells ring in the dusk as a
hundred curtained bodies rush in fluttering
to kneel & sing, of suffering, in glorious songs.

liii. Psychedelic Dream (iii)

When did it matter the most?
When I smiled at another & *believed*.

liv. Perfect Song

Would the perfect song end questing
for the next, that hunger, that wish,
or would it get a greed, new its own,
to now make many perfect songs,
conjure a mathematic, teach another,
& then a mass will come to know?
Would perfection be enough, or the next wall?

lv. A Spider Hung

A spider hung from the garbage can roof,
 spinning lightly in the cool winter's
 breeze, & I was so high & broken
 I begged it to teach. "What would
 you know?" "How & why?"

"Make your web, catch your prey,
 have your fill." "Men are more
 complex than that. You didn't tell
 me why?" "Because you are hungry,
 you need meat, sex, & shelter."

"No." "No?" "What about song?"
 "Song is to lure another to mate."
 "Not else?" "What else?" "What of God?
 What made the world, a why,
 & one's destination upon death."

"What is death?" "It's what happens
 when I crush you, or to that struggling
 mosquito in your web." There is a pause.
 The spider wraps & feeds. "Tell me!
 What is death to you?" "It is nothing."
 "Nothing." Another pause, my own. "Nothing?"
 "No." Years later, I'm still waiting better answer.

lvi. Hanging Bridge

Below is the past, & probably the end, too,
 see how hard those waters clash & foam,
 no answer in any of it. So look ahead,
 another chasm to get over, & what unknown
 green there & beyond. Make a choice in this,
 a good one. Let what possible remain so.

*lvii. After Escher (i)**["Castle in the Air," woodcut on gold-coated paper, 1928]*

To look up there, in these nights,
 how the music again is let out til
 the weaker hours, new music creating itself,
 new music creating the night, & in it
 I find less the ageless cry for understanding
 than for simple release, to the stars, to the rain,
 I open my hands. I breathe with prayer,
 neither from what's gone nor toward
 what's yet. This music falls away with me,
 what I never found moaning from my knees.

*lviii. After Escher (ii)**["Other World," color wood engraving & woodcut, 1947]*

To look out there, worlds without end,
 & the choice to watch, to sing, to fly,
 something else here loves the night & is not
 afraid. Something else mocks time & miles,
 there are no hours or distance, only the dream
 of arriving, nodding, all is near, nothing
 is lost. Out there, up there, in here,
 sate the paradox & win the game.

lix. After Escher (iii)
["Snakes," color woodcut, 1969]

You cannot know what twines the dime,
 what lifts the skin from soul.
 Your mind unwinds to the rings in things
 & tries to bind them whole. You catch the
 breath of another's death & shape your book
 & wax your flame. The prod & nod
 is not from God & seams of dreams
 will tell you so. Your dearth of earth
 is your worth of words & what once
 was three is not a hole. A prime will chime
 til years less clear make you pause for claws
 your heart once chewed & chewed.

The edge of you, what crumbles from true,
 & ugly to view, is yours to keep, to find
 again in sleep, where the hungers gleam
 in dream upon dream & you fall away,
 say farewell to the day, going & gone,
 & never was, & ever on.

lx. Hunger: A Song

*"though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness"*

—Galway Kinnell,

"St. Francis & the Sow," 1980.

There was a brutal report tonight,
the story to do with violence & tenderness,
as most good stories do,
a heavy hand, a shred bit of cotton,
as most good stories do,
& we listened at the bar because, well,
fuck, it was Saturday night, look at the bunch
of us there, late, all the good-looking women
already being hurried home for fucking
or whatever, so we sat listening to this report.

He was a preacher, though nobody was sure of his name. That is, they thought he was this preacher who had hit it big on TV back when, but lost it to the usual devils of whores & cocaine—so they thought that's who they had holed up in the motel room with the runaway girl & a lot of guns & bibles & liquor—oh, everyone leaned forward to hear—

What was being said now was that this preacher'd gone underground, maybe Peru, left behind the paid pussy & zombie powder, no he took to the jungles with the natives, really sunk in, nobody tried to find him after awhile—he had nobody anyway—seems in the jungle he'd found darker gods & mysteries—but this was speculation—

What was known, maybe, was that a preacher had emerged on the gospel tent circuit the kind of which had not been seen in decades—he collected no money for his shows, & never stayed in a town more than one night, & never too big a town—it's like he was a shadow but what he preached & how he preached it—

There was a video, someone had snuck a phone into one of his shows, strictly a no, but anyway it showed the crying & the fainting, & then it showed him talking, just a clip before it was cut—

Talking softly, no microphone, we could hear him say, "There is violence in the human heart, & there is tenderness. What I have learned is that God wants us to crush both of these for him—"

There might have been more but we didn't hear it. The report hurried on to the motel room & the girl & the guns & so on—the stand off on the TV—

"Do you understand?"

"I don't know."

“Do you understand?”
 “Please. God. What?”
 “Violence & tenderness.”
 “I don’t know.”
 “I tried to teach you.”
 “I’m sorry.”
 “When you offered like that—”
 “I—please—”
 “And I asked if you had before—”
 “I never did. I told you that.”
 “Do you know what I learned in the jungles? Do you?”
 “You said it was—life & death?”
 “I saw worlds without end. I walked & flew & dreamed until I disbelieved in nothing.
 Nothing!”
 “OK OK”
 “I saw worlds born & others burn endlessly. I never thought I’d come back here until you
 dreamed me that night”—

She loved when the moon was nearly full, but not quite. Now we’re the same, she smiled,
 nearly full tonight. She left her window open & the crimson curtains drawn so she could dance
 as she did, clearing her room of its debris, its lacy things & trinkets, there was nothing but
 these nights & the rest was a mask for others. She moved slowly across her floor, more & more
 heated by the nearly full moonlight & she knew he watched, as he had long watched, & he was
 coming nearer all the time, she would dance for him & they would know a moment, her cries
 were an animal’s that night until she passed out, & finally dreamed his face—

The reporter was getting bored. Police had brought in a negotiator but they had been talking
 on the phone for nearly an hour.

“She won’t leave him. We don’t know her name or anything about her.”
 “What about the noise? The cries? The motel called the cops. That’s why I’m here.”
 The negotiator shrugged & was leaving when there was gunfire. Everyone ran for cover, the
 cops panicked & would have gunned down the door & killed everything inside if it hadn’t
 opened at that moment.

She came out, in a slip.
 Hands timidly raised, barefoot.
 Her face solemn, & unafraid.
 No blood on her was her own.

The bar was closing, they’d let us stay to watch the report even after they killed the taps &
 locked the door.

“Wait. Is he coming out?”
 “In a bag. It’s time for you gentlemen to get along home. You can’t stay here.”

“Why is it taking so long?”

I went to him when he came to my town.
 I went to him knowing I'd never come back.
 I dressed for him & sat in the front row.
 I smiled but kept my eyes down.
 He would claim me. I'd wait.

“Violence & tenderness,” he said over & over, & I saw how his face had thinned from the pictures I'd found online of his younger days.

“Violence & tenderness. God wants us to crush both of these for him, wants us to relinquish ourselves, our wills, whatever defiant hangs by our bones.”

I nodded & waited. I was not shocked as the others when he cried up to the skies, “No! I do so no longer! My last night of this! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!”

When he took my hand I went quickly, there were angry shouts. He was not being paid to cuss at God & defy, we left quickly.

He outdrove the few who followed. He told me quietly it would be easier to just get them another preacher than try to right whatever demons took my head.

The motel we checked in never saw me in truth. I don't think they would have liked it. But I knew. I knew what my dancing & dreams & the moon had conjured.

But it went wrong. I mean there was a moment I thought, us sitting on the bed, him touching my cheek, breathing close to my neck—but then he said, “If it could have been anyone it would have been you” & when I leaned forward—

I bring everyone to my place because everyone knows I have the best hash & someone brings beers & a few girls, probably drunk, bored, & horny, show up—and we look online for the story of what happened at the motel—was there a shootout? Who was the girl?

The reports contradict each other badly. One says she was a runaway high school girl with a taste for weed & older men—others say she wasn't that young or that innocent—like she was feeding this crazy preacher a line—so we smoke on it—smoke & smoke—the girls get high & want to fuck—the night passes—at least I get one who could suck cock pretty good—

Before she came out, he'd begun talking again & she believed again for a moment.

“Myths breathe by the men who believe, & expire when the last one has fallen.”

I look at him, waiting.

“I have no myths left. You were my last one.” I turn from him & I hear the noise of a gun. As I open the door & walk into the police searchlights I wait for the bullet to take me. It doesn't

come.

For a moment this bitch sucks my cock so well, I mean deep & rhythmic & hard, that I can't see, I'm hallucinating, crying, there's a thick smell, a smell like sex & trees & rot & fruit all in one, & while it lasts I see the preacher's eyes bright as a deathly fever—

"You wanted to know"

"Yes—I"

"Let go"

"I—"

"Let go!"

There's blood & cum everywhere.

It's like I exploded all over the room.

All my violence, all my tenderness, was gone.

06-28-2009
Portland Oregon

* * * * *



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G.C. Dillon

Come Away, O Human Child

[New Fiction]

*Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.*

—W.B. Yeats, “The Stolen Child,” 1889.

“Hey Justin! Miss Indigo’s waiting for the groom. She says you’ve been a bad boy.”

“You hired a stripper-dominatrix?”

“Yep.”

“How’s your Corona?”

“Dos Equis is a better Mexican beer.”

“Thought you liked it. It’s always in your fridge.”

“It’s Anita’s only choice.”

“The ‘mixologist’ is complaining that we’re in the buckle of the Bible belt and he has to use nips for all his cocktails. A good bartender, he informs, can get more pours out of a real bottle. I wonder, though, does that mean we are getting less or more liquor?”

He waved his hand about. “I know there are bigger bugs down South, but these fireflies take the prize.”

“I used to live here. My dad was one of those white-shirt-narrow-tie Yankees sent down here help set up the plant. His co-workers told him what places not to go into without ‘em. My dad made himself welcome because he was from Maine. Got into an argument with some guy in a bar about the best way to skin a deer. Endearred him as a backwoodsman.”

“How do you skin deer?”

“Couldn’t tell ya. You know the woods by the Wal-Mart where the sign for the Wiccan Church is? That’s where we used to hunt when I was a kid, when I lived down here.”

“Hunt much?”

“I was in the woods a lot.” Justin smiled a bit at the memory. The firefly flew about him again.

“So you grew up here and meet Anita in New England. Long lost love story?”

“I think I had a class with Anita once when we were kids. I really didn’t meet her until we were both working at Corporate.” I paused, the floating lights of the flying insects distracting my attention, before: “I’ll be there in a bit.”

“You don’t have cold feet . . .” He laughed.

“Not exactly.” After the bachelor party *tzar* left, I said, “You can manifest; I know that firefly is you.”

The tiny light grew into the form of a beautiful winged woman, Balefire of the Pixie. She

lifted her hands to her shoulders and slowly closed her fists. Her so-very-darned-lovely gossamer wings faded to nothingness. Balefire wore an asymmetrical brown skirt of tanned hide. It hung lower on her right hip and very much shorter on her left. An azure, low cut, V-neck tunic hung about her torso. Her short blonde hair scraped the nape of her long neck. The scabbard of a huge broadsword hung from her hip. She rested her hand sedulously upon the pommel.

"Why is Anita's sobriquet *white chocolate* on your cell phone?"

I blushed.

"I know why you are here."

"Do you?" she asked.

"I loved you when I was nine. But at sixteen, it was different. I couldn't be a child forever."

"*It wasn't you; it was me.* Is that what you are saying?" Balefire snarled. Fangs flashed brightly in her teeth, jutting beyond her lower lips.

"Come with me to the *Otherworld*," Balefire said. "Anita is comely, but you do know the happiness you lived with me when you are with her. You recall your life before. I see it in your aura. *Come with me, Human Child.*"

* * *

I wore a doublet, hose, and a beret-cap. But everyone who looked my way saw a three piece Italian-tailored suit, a lavender shirt, and a stripped tie. My poniard looked to be a cell phone at my belt to any casual observer. The hospital receptionist gave me Anita's room number. I thanked her, and turned toward the elevator. Balefire stood inside the tiny moving cubicle. A mylar balloon and a big box of chocolate truffles were in her arms. Balefire smirked.

"You forgot to get her a present." I took the gifts. I did get her a small teddy bear already.

"Are you prepared?" Balefire asked.

"Anita needs me now," I answered. "I have much to make up to her for."

"She had a bun in the oven. I am sure it would be different if it had been your yeast."

* * *

A Van Dyke beard graced my face unlike the last time we met.

"You!" My former fiancée's eyes sparked with a fire hotter than *Gehenna*. "You abandoned your job. Your father didn't know where you were. I just don't understand—you just disappeared two years ago. No one knew what had happened. We found your car in the parking lot, your clothes in the hotel room." She slammed her fists down upon her bed sheets. "You forsook me! You—"

A small crib was set by her bed. A baby rested within. I reached down to adjust the child's pink blankie. Her daughter was as bright as *Lughmassadh*.

"Can you explain?" she asked, her voice sharp as a scalpel, cold as *Samhain*, coarse as a banshee.

Explain Balefire! My *inamorata*. "No. It's too complicated. All can say is I'm here now."

She turned her head away. "How long this time?"

A short human lifetime, thought I, the pixie consort. "As long as you need. As long as she needs."

"You do know you're not the father. There's no baby daddy, just a sperm donor. He fled—"

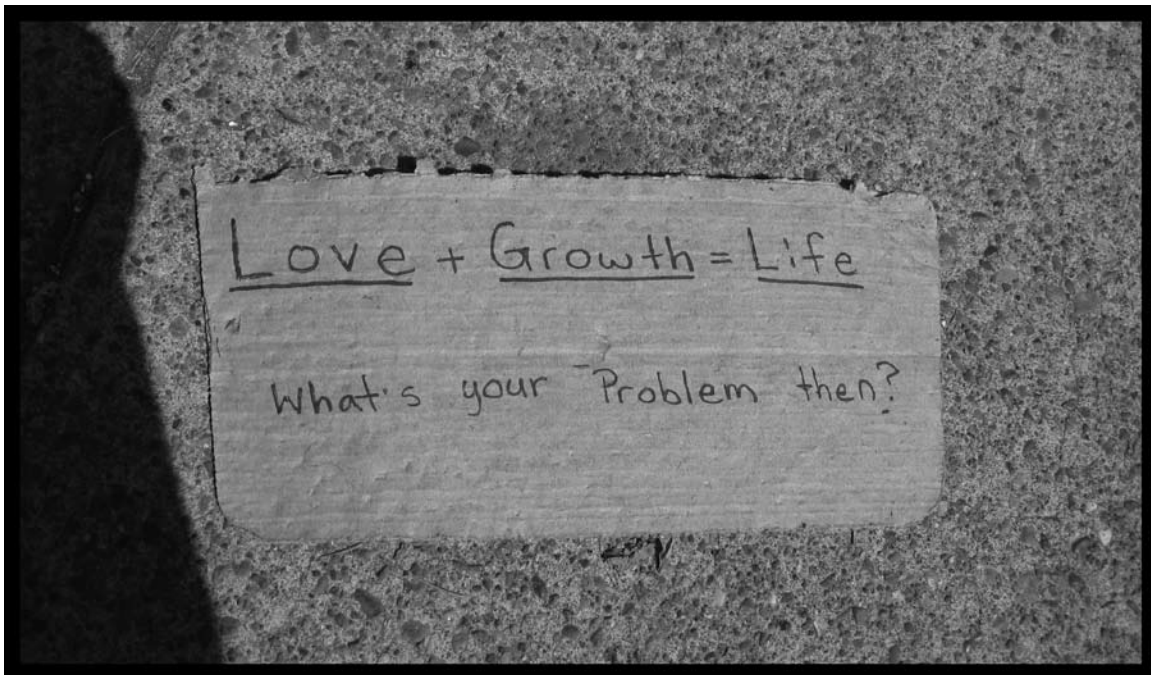
looks like my pattern.” I shook my head. “I wasn’t careful,” Anita confessed.

“I’m not criticizing. You have a beautiful daughter.” Could she have been mine? Or rather, what would mine—ours—have been like? I’ve seen things, experienced wild things: The cold rings of Saturn, floating above the red spot. An orange sky with two daytime moons, a rocky dwarf silver mine. But all these failed against the sight before me. Her tiny fingers, her barely slit mouth, and her tightly shut eyes. Black pupils, I knew. Her cheeks puffed out with baby fat. “I’ve been places,” I said.

Anita frowned. Did she just imagine me homeless or spending the required ninety days only at a series of Salvation Army shelters?

“May I hold her?” Carefully I lifted the baby, cradling her in my arm and elbow, supporting her still knitting skull with the palm of my hand. Come with me. Oh, Human child, I thought. Someday I’ll show you the wonders I’ve seen. But today, dear one, one who could have, should have been my human child, live well in this world. Live well! I will see to that—with all the power of the *sidhe* supporting me.

* * * * *





Galway Kinnell**The Bear**

1

In late winter
I sometimes glimpse bits of steam
coming up from
some fault in the old snow
and bend close and see it is lung-colored
and put down my nose
and know
the chilly, enduring odor of bear.

2

I take a wolf's rib and whittle
it sharp at both ends
and coil it up
and freeze it in blubber and place it out
on the fairway of the bears.

And when it has vanished
I move out on the bear tracks,
roaming in circles
until I come to the first, tentative, dark
splash on the earth.

And I set out
running, following the splashes
of blood wandering over the world.
At the cut, gashed resting places
I stop and rest,
at the crawl-marks
where he lay out on his belly
to overpass some stretch of bauchy ice
I lie out
dragging myself forward with bear-knives in my fists.

3

On the third day I begin to starve,
at nightfall I bend down as I knew I would
at a turd sopped in blood,
and hesitate, and pick it up,
and thrust it in my mouth, and gnash it down,
and rise
and go on running.

4

On the seventh day,
living by now on bear blood alone,
I can see his upturned carcass far out ahead, a scraggled,
steamy hulk,
the heavy fur riffling in the wind.

I come up to him
and stare at the narrow-spaced, petty eyes,
the dismayed face laid back on the shoulder, the nostrils
flared, catching
perhaps the first taint of me as he
died.

I hack
a ravine in his thigh, and eat and drink,
and tear him down his whole length
and open him and climb in
and close him up after me, against the wind,
and sleep.

5

And dream
of lumbering flatfooted
over the tundra,
stabbed twice from within,
splattering a trail behind me,
splattering it out no matter which way I lurch,
no matter which parabola of bear-transcendence,
which dance of solitude I attempt,
which gravity-clutched leap,
which trudge, which groan.

6

Until one day I totter and fall—
fall on this
stomach that has tried so hard to keep up,
to digest the blood as it leaked in,
to break up
and digest the bone itself: and now the breeze
blows over me, blows off
the hideous belches of ill-digested bear blood
and rotted stomach
and the ordinary, wretched odor of bear,

blows across
my sore, lolled tongue a song
or screech, until I think I must rise up
and dance. And I lie still.

I awake I think. Marshlights
reappear, geese
come trailing again up the flyway.
In her ravine under old snow the dam-bear
lies, licking
lumps of smeared fur
and drizzly eyes into shapes
with her tongue. And one
hairy-soled trudge stuck out before me,
the next groaned out,
the next,
the next,
the rest of my days I spend
wandering: wondering
what, anyway,
was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that poetry, by which I lived?

Saint Francis and the Sow

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath
them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.

After Making Love We Hear Footsteps

For I can snore like a bullhorn
or play loud music
or sit up talking with any reasonably sober Irishman
and Fergus will only sink deeper
into his dreamless sleep, which goes by all in one flash,
but let there be that heavy breathing
or a stifled come-cry anywhere in the house
and he will wrench himself awake
and make for it on the run—as now, we lie together,
after making love, quiet, touching along the length of our bodies,
familiar touch of the long-married,
and he appears—in his baseball pajamas, it happens,
the neck opening so small he has to screw them on—
and flops down between us and hugs us and snuggles himself to sleep,
his face gleaming with satisfaction at being this very child.

In the half darkness we look at each other
and smile
and touch arms across this little, startlingly muscled body—
this one whom habit of memory propels to the ground of his making,
sleeper only the mortal sounds can sing awake,
this blessing love gives again into our arms.

My Mother's R & R

She lay late in bed. Maybe she was sick,
though she was never sick. There were
pink flowers in full blossom in the wallpaper
and motes like bits of something ground up
churning in sunrays from the windows.
We climbed into bed with her.
Perhaps she needed comforting,
and she was alone, and she let us take
a breast each out of the loose slip.
“Let’s make believe we’re babies,”
Derry said. We put the large pink
flowers at the end of those lax breasts
into our mouths and sucked with enthusiasm.
She laughed and seemed to enjoy our play.
Perhaps intoxicated by our pleasure,
or frustrated by the failure of the milk
to flow, we sucked harder, probably
our bodies writhed, our eyes flared,
certainly she could feel our teeth.
Abruptly she took back her breasts
and sent us from the bed, two small
hungry boys enflamed and driven off
by the she-wolf. But we had got our nip,
and in the empire we would found,
we would taste all the women and expel
each one as she came to resemble her.

The Frog Pond

In those first years I came down
 often to the frog pond—once called,
 before the earthen dam wore away,
 the farm pond—to bathe, standing
 on a rock and throwing pond water over me—
 and doing it quickly because of the leeches,
 who need but minutes to know you're there—
 or to read the mail or to scribble
 or to loaf and think, sometimes
 of the future, while the one deerfly
 that torments everyone who walks in Vermont
 in July—smack it dead as often
 as one will—orbited about my head.
 Then the beavers came, the waters rose,
 and the frog pond became the beaver pond.
 The next year a sunken rowboat surfaced,
 with sheet metal nailed all around it
 to hold the hull boards in place
 while they rotted. The four
 of us would oar, pole, and bail
 a few feet above the sunken green bank
 where a man used to sit and think
 and look up and seem to see four people
 up here oaring and poling and bailing
 above him: the man *seems* happy,
 the two children laugh and splash,
 a slight shadow crosses the woman's face.
 Then one spring the beavers disappeared—
 trapped off, or else gone away
 on their own—and soon this pond,
 like the next, and the one after that,
 will flow off, leaving behind its print
 in the woods, a sudden green meadow
 with gleams of sky meandering through it.
 The man who lies propped up
 on an elbow, scribbling in a notebook
 or quietly thinking, will be older
 and will remember the pond that was here,
 writhing with leeches and overflown
 by the straight blue bodies of dragonflies,
 and will think of small children
 grown up and true love broken
 and will sit up abruptly and swat
 the hard-biting deerfly on his head,
 crushing it into his hair, as he has done before.

Promissory Note

If I die before you
which is all but certain
then in the moment
before you will see me
become someone dead
in a transformation
as quick as a shooting star's
I will cross over into you
and ask you to carry
not only your own memories
but mine too until you
too lie down and erase us
both together into oblivion.



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

It isn't difficult to deduce that in the U.S. reproductive rights for women (including legalized abortion, contraceptives, sexual education & counseling) is a political issue kindred to gay rights (gay marriage, partner health benefits, & so on). What the religious fanatics in this country have tried to do, with some success, is to frame the debates over these issues as ones based on morality, rather than as issues of individual civil liberties. Why? Gay men & women, & women with educated autonomy over their bodies, do not dutifully follow the biblical command to be fruitful & multiply. For zealots, a man's seed belongs inside his spouse's unshielded vagina for the purpose of procreation. No condoms, no pre-marital coupling, and a clearly strictured choice in sexual partner. Celibacy is for priests. Prolonged bachelorhood is not an option. Sexual experimentation is an abomination.

It's not enough, in responding to such a view, to say there are many paths to the truth. One must say there are many truths as likely as there is one truth. While it is certainly possible to live in a society of heterogeneous beliefs without there needing to be a victor & the rest defeated, yet it seems that this society can at best treat representative democracy as a kind of sport in which two sides somehow successfully divide neatly & encompass the wide range of views. The mass media propagates this cartoonish version of valid cultural debate about gay rights, reproductive rights, & many other issues for that matter (the Iraq War, national healthcare, and immigration, to name a few), & many of our most intelligent thinkers fall too often & too easily into this trap. Winning is all, whether during the Super Bowl or on Election Day.

What, then, does one do with issues such as women's reproductive rights & gay rights? Create regions of the country where one side or the other (remember: only two sides allowed to each question) wins utterly? One could say this exists already. Urban centers have tended to accept and integrate gays while rural areas have not. Sex education is urban. Sex abstinence teaching is rural. Abortion choices are more common in cities.

But I wonder if this really works out either. I wonder because while it may be an observable truth, it's not as though any area easily and completely accepts its local norm.

What then? In truth, I don't know. I do know that it's interesting to see the issue of gay rights surface as yet another Democratic president stakes his presidency on achieving nationalized healthcare. Bill Clinton's efforts failed in the early '90s, and he lost party control of Congress in 1994. I've wondered if some powerful opponents to government subsidized healthcare have seen a template for victory in what happened to Clinton—his disastrous "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" compromise, his healthcare defeat. While I believe Barack Obama to

be a smarter, more wiley president, his victory is not assured. This summer will see an vicious all-out assault on what's called the "public option," designed to offer affordable coverage to the tens of millions currently unable to afford health insurance.

Why would anyone work to deny this basic right, basic need? I believe it also ties into the same thinking that opposes reproductive rights for women & civil rights for gays. I believe that there is a deep-seated fanaticism in this nation which opposes helping the weak, the poor, the sick.

To build a strong, an all-powerful Empire capable of dominating & converting the heathen world, it comes down to this: women must breed in large numbers, gays must be converted to heterosexuality or destroyed as abominations, the weak & sick must be left to die as their seed will weaken the Empire, & the poor who do not die must provide the raw power to serve the rest in menial jobs until they, too, die, leaving their progeny to take over their places on the line. The masses exist not to live long, healthy, fruitful, upwardly tending lives but as batteries (like in the 1999 film *The Matrix*): work, breed, sicken, and die. Their numbers thus will remain large, but not too large, & they will never become a real threat to the Empire's ruling classes, its corporate theocracy.

There is in this nation a thick, ugly stratum of thinking, a self-righteousness, driven unto fury to purify the population & drive out or destroy those who would not take their assigned part. It is only a part of the population, but it is the most dangerous, the most unwilling to reason, the most likely to burn, to pillage, to murder, & then kneel afterwards with shining eyes raised to the skies, convinced that the destruction & spilled blood is a necessary part of doing God's will & work.

What yearns in each human heart toward truth, a clear answer regarding how to live & why, can as easily raise a fist toward another as hold out a hand. No legislation can snuff out such a yearning, no education can with certainty lessen its power, or its vulnerability to smiling lunatics in handsome suits, bearing books of pretty words about cleansing annihilations.

What hope, if any, to take from all of this? None of us are totally immune to persuasively made answers to the gnawingly difficult questions we bear about suffering & purpose. Allow your doubts of gurus & other so-called "bearers of light." Question each & all who claim to have solved life's mysteries. Keep your feet moving, your mind fluid, your beliefs subject to questions & doubts, change, transformation. He who refuses to change, whose awareness rusts with presumptions too long held about what the world is, & how it works, is, I believe, one who will move a couple of steps slower than needed when, if, the fire-wielding singers of songs about purification come to town, with a leader, & a plan—

* * * * *



Judih Haggai



So Many Choirs

So many choirs
off tune, in the distance,
harmony askew,
pushed out of dreams,
standing in line,
singing for a new day.



Donkey and Woman by Judih Haggai

Feeding Her Baby

My baby's sitting patiently,
awaiting her dose of coke, THC, or acid,
no problem, she's patient,
she knows her Mama's there,
she feels her Mama's vibrations,
baby knows, she feels, she waits.

Mama needs to feed her baby,
her instincts bring her home,
traveling the Annapurna,
traversing Chinese walls,
all good, all essential—
but Mama needs to feed her baby—
oh yeah



Oxen by Judih Haggai

a simple breathless reprisal

so i was strolling down the internet
flickr to my left, twitter to my right
@ and “ every which way
and i felt like i belonged
i was home
and someone had my back
a simple breathless reprisal
a one-time, back porch peace of mind
and it was good. so
good



Shadow by Judih Haggai

Waking in the Morning

Waking in the morning,
how old am I,
am I still here?
Who dwells inside,
is she still there,
horrific but fabulous—
life goes on—



Ralph H. Emerson



F is for Flutter

[Essay]

If you try to imitate the sustained noise of wind or surf with your mouth, you'll probably make a long swirly *ffffff* sound or extend the breathy *hwwwwuh* you'd use to blow out a candle. That sort of onomatopoeia automatically brands both F and W as windy letters. The shape of F even looks like a flag floating in the wind. Indeed, before the Romans borrowed it to represent the *f* sound, F had served in the old Greek alphabet (under the name digamma) as the Greek letter for *w*.

Wind

Besides once sharing a letter, the labials *f* and *w* also bring airy connotations to the words they begin: *flag* and *wave*, *fly* and *wing*, *flail* and *whip*. Some *w* words begin with *sw*, like *swoop* and *swarm*. Both *sw*- and *fl*- words tend to have literal meanings of 'moving in air or water': *swim* and *float*, *swarm* and *flock*, *sway*, *swoop*, *swish*, *flicker*, *flap*, *flutter*. A *swan* is a water bird, *swifts* and *flickers* are air birds, and *swift* and *fleet* both mean 'fast.' The airy F easily adapts itself to water because air and water are both *fluids*, the chemical term for substances that *flow*. That's why the Latin verb *fluere* 'flow' is so close to *flare* 'blow'. Watery English words like *flood* and *fountain* draw on the same phonaestheme; so does *flookum*, the circus term for 'drinks or other liquids'. French slang for 'water' is *les flottes*, and 'river' is *fleuve*, like Italian *fiume* or German *Fluss*.

Mostly, though, F is the air letter. In an alphabet poem of 1788 called "L'Harmonie imitative," the Frenchman de Piis wrote that F expresses the dash and flight of the wind ("exprime la *fougue* et la *fuite* du vent"). It flogs with a vengeful whip ("le *fouet* vengeur") and breathes fire, flame, and smoke ("le *feu*, la *flamme* et la *fumée*"). Two other Frenchmen of the same era concurred: Charles de Brosses remarked on the association of *fl* with "fluid, whether fiery or aquatic or aerial," and Charles Nodier said that F's natural suggestion of "breathing or whistling" explains why the letter is so common in wind-instrument words. His examples were *fanfare* 'trumpet flourish' and *fifre* 'fife', to which we may add *French horn*, *flügelhorn*, *flageolet*, and *flute*.

In Japanese, 'flute' is *fue*, 'bellows' are *fuigo*, 'waving' is *furu*, human 'breathing' is *fuku*, 'blowfish' is *fugu*, and 'air or wind' itself is plain *fu*. Chinese for 'wind' is *feng*. (Cantonese 'big wind' is *taaî fung*, our *typhoon*.) Nigerian Tiv uses the verb *feher* for the 'blowing wind', *fehe* for 'human exhaling', and *fisi* for 'farting'. Japanese *fuki* is 'flatulence'. English itself has *fart* and *flatulence*, plus *fizzle* for a 'quiet, sneaky fart'—a type similarly called a *feswah* in Arabic. Onomatopoeic F's are definitely world citizens.

Airy Nothings

Atop the onomatopoeia rise the castles of metaphor. In English, metaphorical F words most typically begin with *fl-* and have a distinctly dismissive tone: *flimsy*, *flaky*, *flashy*. The quality they mock is ‘insubstantiality’, the lack of heft and firmness we associate with airy things like *fluff*, *fur*, *fuzz*, *fizz*, *foam*, *froth*. They are all “light as a *feather*” and in danger of floating away on passing breezes. Here are some figurative subsets: ‘Weak’ is *feeble*, *frail*, *feckless*. ‘Trifling’ is *fussy*, *finicky*, *fancy*. ‘Marginal’ is *fringe* and *freaky*. ‘Impermanent’ suggests *fads*, *fashions*, *fancies*. ‘Cheap’ suggests *flea markets* and *flophouses*. ‘Unsuccessful’ describes *failures*, *flops*, *fiascoes*. ‘Wasting time’ is *futz*ing, *farting*, or *fiddling around*. ‘Playing’ is *frolicking*, *fun*, *frivolity*, *foolishness*. ‘Casual sex’ is a *fling*, otherwise called *fooling around*, *philandering*, *fornicating*, or *fucking*.

Although *fuck* is taboo enough to be called “the F word,” modern slang uses it constantly in figurative ways, most often to help express the very sort of F notions listed above. *Fucking around* is ‘wasting time’, *fucking up* is ‘failing’, *fucking idiots* are ‘useless’, and “I don’t give a *flying fuck*” is supremely dismissive. Earlier generations put their F’s into comical interjections like *phooey!* *fie!* *faugh!* *fiddlesticks!* *fiddle-de-dee!* All of those meant “I don’t care a *fig* for it,” the same sentiment so vividly expressed in the French phrases “Je m’en *fiche!*” and “Je m’en *fous!*”

F’s also characterize liars’ smoke, their *fib*s, *feints*, *fudges*, and *flattery*. Hardcore liars are *four-flushers* and *flim-flamming fly-by-night phonies*. The smoothie lawyer in the play/musical/film *Chicago* is Billy Flynn. “All your legal *foofarawing* only *frazzles* things till there’s no real right or wrong left,” says a homesteader in a Jack Schaefer story. The Folger Shakespeare Library called a recent exhibit “*Fakes, Forgeries, and Facsimiles.*” *Fact or fiction*, who can say? Naturally, political rhetoric is prime F territory, one that Arnold Schwarzenegger entered when he joined the 2003 California governor’s race. “The politicians,” he declared, “are *fiddling*, *fumbling*, and *failing*.” He was promptly accused of trying “to *fake* his way through the election” with “*fuzzy math*’ on steroids”! Next year, John Kerry lost the presidential race after his opponents managed to brand him as a “*flip-flopper*,” and worse yet, as a man who “looks *French*”—a dreadful insult in any era.

Politicians disclaim weakness by repudiating F’s and W’s. “We shall not *flag* or *fail*,” Prime Minister Winston Churchill promised war-torn England in 1940: “We shall never surrender!” His memoirs for the year confirmed it: “We had not *flinched* or *wavered*. We had not *failed*.” George W. Bush’s writers borrowed that in 2003: “We will not *waver*, we will not tire, we will not *falter*.” Even the Founding Fathers of 1776, says David McCullough, wrestled America into being despite their personal “*flaws* and *failings*,” not to mention the “ruffled shirts and powdered hair” that made them look “like *fops*, *softies*”—or *women*, if he’d dared to say that.

The Fair Sex

“Who’s that Girlie Girl?” asked a recent headline in my local paper. “The Ruffles are *Flapping* in the Wind—A *Flourish* of *Feminine* Details Moves to the *Fashion Front*.” The article opened: “*Flick* those curls. *Flutter* those lashes.” Flapping in the wind—see how air is reflexively mentioned alongside the F’s? Femininity resides in swirling fabric fanned by F’s breezes. Virginia Woolf said that women’s presence is mixed with “the *flowing* of robes,” and

de Piis wrote in 1788 that F trembles at the rustle of light taffeta, “*frémit quand on froisse un taffetas léger.*”

Anne Hollander’s *Sex and Suits* also used F’s to evoke women’s dress in the 1700s: “In the French fashion plates, the *feminine figure* is filled out with puffy *fichus*, ballooning skirts covered with bubbly *furbelows*, vast *airborne* hats *festooned* with ruffles and garlands, supported by mountains of *frizzed* and *fluffed* hair. The whole cloud-like ensemble is further attended by the movement of thin veils and ribbons that *catch the air* as the lady walks.” Similar words appear all over the book—*frippery*, *fanciful*, *frivolous*, *froth*, *fussiness*, *fantasy*—until it reaches the Victorian era, when a few influential women finally reined in the decorative extremes. They feared that “*feminine fashion*” would otherwise be forever “seen as *feminine folly* in material form, *female weakness* made manifest” and be “forever linked . . . with *falsity*.”

Modern women tend to downplay the F’s along with the ruffles. A relative of mine says his daughter’s wedding “won’t be a *fluffy* thing; she’s not a *frilly* girl.” Actress Cynthia Nixon says she’s “not much of a *flitter*, not much of a *flirter*.” Lisa Kudrow’s *Phoebe* on TV’s *Friends* is a parody of *flakiness*, a quality that real-life women carefully disclaim. I have heard one woman dismiss another as “kind of *flaky* . . . *floating* in and out,” and Whitewater convict Susan McDougal wonders today if she seemed “*flaky*” while “*fluttering* and *flirting*” through her Southern girlhood in the 1960s. *Femmy* women do seem flaky now: a *feminist* dare not be too *feminine*.

Those words are all rooted in Latin *femina* ‘woman’, akin to *femella* ‘girl’ and our own *female*. (French and Swedish girls are *filles* and *flickas*.) The F’s are for biology. The girl next door is supposed to be *fresh* and *frisky*, lovely in *face* and *figure*, a “young, *fertile*, *fruitful* woman.” So said actress Scarlett Johansson at age eighteen, freely naming the *fecundity* that *Harper’s* could only hint at in 1886 at when it praised American girls as “*feminine* and *fair*.” Our ancestors wrapped female fertility in ruffles and insisted on calling the effect *femininity*, never noticing how their chaste ideal subverted itself everywhere it went, growing *femmes fatales* and *forbidden fetishes* in its shadows and helplessly trailing a caricature parade of *flibbertigibbets*, *flappers*, and *flighty*, *flirty*, *flippity floozies*.

Lighter Than Air

Feminine men, especially gay ones, are subject to similar caricatures: *fairy*, *fag*, *flit*, *fruit*. Gay flight attendants are *air fairies* or *flying flames*. An old book archly mentions “Oscar Wilde, the noted *flower fancier*.” Two men in a play “are disparagingly presented as *flouncy* homosexuals.” The gay golden boy in Evelyn Waugh’s 1945 novel *Brideshead Revisited* is Lord Sebastian *Flyte*, and the old German word for a gay man was *Florenzer*. Gays are *fey*, *effete*, *effeminate*, *flaming* and *flamboyant*, and they say “*Fabulous!*” Can you feel a breeze? On the cop show *The Job*, one character remarks that “Gays like harp music—it’s light and *airy*, like them.” Yeah, says his buddy, “That guy was *floatin’* a foot off the ground!”

F’s also peppered reviews for 2003’s hit makeover TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Its gay makeover artists, the *Fab Five*, are “*five fairy* godfathers” who “*sweep* in” each week to transform a straight slob. (Two other reviews said “*swoop* in.”) Greg Morago of *The Hartford Courant* said this “giggling gaggle of *five fabulous*, *fearless flibbertigibbets* armed with exfoliators [and] color swatches . . . dangerously *flirts* with the stereotype” that “all homosexual men have inbred *fashion-accessorizing*, *flower-arranging*” skills. Another reviewer said the show was just a

harmless “*fantasy fulfillment*” about kindly attention, and Maureen Dowd yawned that straight men were increasingly going for “*femme tastes like facials*” anyway.

Straight F men are weak and comic. The sitcom character *Frasier* is typical: even the actor who played him called him “*flawed and silly*.” That could also describe *Felix* Ungar, Basil *Fawlty*, and any number of fictional Freds, from *Fred Flintstone* to *Freddy Krueger*. Among novelist P. G. Wodehouse’s many Freds are the “loopy” uncle in “*Uncle Fred Flits By*,” the comedian *Freddie Flowerdew*, and young *Freddie* Widgeon, who happens to be a virtual double of the lovesick *Freddy* Eynsford Hill in *My Fair Lady*. They’re both idle young men about town—*flâneurs* in French, *footloose and fancy free*. Shakespeare’s *Falstaff* and Lt. *Fuzz* in *Beetle Bailey* represent another stock F type, the inept soldier. Some of these soldiers are even cowards, like Harry *Faversham* in A. E. Mason’s 1902 novel *The Four Feathers* and Sir Harry *Flashman* in George MacDonald Fraser’s tales. *Sir Harry*? *Lord Sebastian Flyte*? Little Lord *Fauntleroy*? Yes, for the very nadir of male weakness is the F aristocrat, a type best dissected in Restoration comedies three centuries ago, with the likes of Lord *Froth*, Lord *Foppington*, and Sir *Fopling Flutter*.

Of course, not every F word applies to fops, flirts, or flügelhorns. In this series of essays on the consonants, I have room for only the few meaning-associations that seem most salient and characteristic. They are very real, though, and the uncanny agreements in all the vocabulary items and illustrative quotes show clearly that the webs made by these associations stretch out very similarly inside each of our heads. These webs lie just below conscious awareness, in a twilight where “most of our overt language behavior is accompanied by a flurry of covert word-association activity,” as Roger Wescott says. That hidden chatter is what I am trying to interpret, and if it often sounds facile and chauvinistic, that is exactly because it is unconscious. But isn’t it interesting!

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Why ? [a new fixtion]

(concluded)

clxii.

A mystery, a riddle, a chase, a maze, a journey, this, a pursuit, a psychotropic fairy tale, metaphysical travelogue, raw symphony, chocolate high arc of event & misdeed, breathe, shh, near, ahh, tis, what tis, tis what, tis, tis what tis, what this world but the cosmos confessing all, every throb toward kindness & cruel, what this universe but a torment & salve of continue, breathe, relax, say it again, I watch figures lean in & know more, summing heat, a service, a show, a try at reinventing the world by flicker & powder, recall me this night held back from memory, recall it now, for its story too could be this book, its story a mystery, a riddle, & so on, nothing forever & nothing gone

Kiss me because you could
teach me of your want's hard chase
let me know it matters
every day the try, the hard high great gobbled leap try to see new & see now & an hour of some passing scrap says yes *this* is how, *this* is true, the rest lesser, a tired stumble, wait the shine, it will near again, wait the shine
to remember wider & longer
maybe to see new
always the spasming beg
to see now

I can see particles, a building, a spark of that day's weather or emotional complex—but not much more—sentiment, perhaps a bite harder than sentiment—what then? Clue? I'm ugly with such pockings

What wish to craft & handed where? The universe is little & grandly knowable but not by a familiar light—men mistake a shocking taste of its potent meat with knowledge of the beast when whole, of its creation and cease, how to steer, where the map, who the maker, will this & so, or will that & so

Why? Never far from why? Never answered but a flash, or some smiling guru's sturdy lie—why? & why? & why? & why?

I want to push harder & know how to know
the long arc rises——
rises—& I think how I cannot do this alone—not simply me not all of this—not as possibility keeps revealing a larger stage, greater canvas, no, cannot do it, all of it, alone—never have but no, cannot—

so I wonder—that's what I'm doing right now—this later night's hour—& push at this book with my rough pen's want—

long arc—rises—rises steeper—there is so much to be about—

clxiii.

The sense of coming apart, of change, of departure, Maya feels it nearer, it tugs at her from within, she can't tell Dylan, she wants to, she wishes, she wants, she knows where bound, it was determined before she met Dylan on that bus & only delayed by all passing since—

It's been stipulated. She must appear freely & pure. She knows what's meant by each yet wonders over her own sense of purity.

Yet he'll shut it all down at her word, the great experiment, all will be released, the efforts ended

What could it have meant, any of it? He believed he could bridge the chasm—

Wasn't it just a lot of fucking?

No. Not quite.

Each was explained. Listening or not. The words were spoken. The lesson or indoctrination or whatever began immediately with—

Why hadn't it worked with her? What had gone wrong? What would her return do?

Her heart & thighs didn't belong to Global Wall. Yet he sought to break & harness as a way of life—so why just her & all the others let go—

She knew his demands. Knew what she would have to join in. She'd been a part of it for a short time, & listened. It was a process. She didn't witness each step but the results.

Why hadn't it worked with her? She'd not been touched. She'd been prepared as all of the others, in pink, in scent, lace, a razor, the understanding of restraints for reward or punishment, but not by her own pleasure—

She noticed how they came back, dazed, & the next time, accepting, & the next time, something like resolved—

How the returned ones were assigned elsewhere after a short time—

She waited her turn—waiting, someone else's will had always been her life—

“Stand straight. He won't abide a slouching girl.”

A brush to her hair.

“Straighter! Spine. You've got the kind of round ass & breasts he likes, just pay attention. Learn his will, know his pleasures. Details will serve you here.”

She stood straight, let herself be primped & studied, these things were familiar—

& so close when it had happened she was ready, had decided to listen, to let it happen, there was no escape, no friends, & what of that life back there? Just other hands, fouler places than this one—she'd decided—

She'd asked to see his face—others had—but he hadn't believed them—stalling, manipulative—her question was curiosity, nothing else—

the one prior to her had been difficult. So bitchy that the pleasure, the purpose turned dark, & away. It became punishing rebellious flesh, breaking it, & again—he made sure she saw the cameras, made her buck & cry for them, took off her gag long enough to let her scream & moan, & a two finger signal created a feedback loop for when he fucked her again she listened to her moans & curses over & over, & new moments were fed in & he signaled the walls & ceiling feed live this fuck for her to watch, it had been difficult because she was so sure she'd seen it all, could handle it fine—could talk her way out of it—she'd had close calls before but a persuasive, & wet tongue, a good knowing hand had saved her—

She'd been in a bed or two like this & found her way out too. It was a game. She liked it. It gave her something to think about in the day. Someone else was writing their scripts. These occasional nights were hers—

the tease was so easy—a bit of flat tummy, a flash of tight ass, her tits were decent, she'd seen better, but nobody used them better—

So he was rich, had paid some fucking goons to take her. She'd seen worse. The rest of the girls were for show. *Big bad bull.*

The air in the room was soft, but pressing. He was arrived before she was ready.

He was too quiet. Get them talking, play them, words & touch, more of the first but emphasize the second—

he wouldn't talk—he didn't want her to talk either—his touch was direct—knowing—she was repelled but responded—

She knew when she felt his two fingers snap her black thong & flip it aside—not for a later souvenir—he didn't care—didn't think like that—she was his, she was *next*, she was *now*, there was no option—

Before her first scream the silk gag in her mouth, her hands in manacles to the headboard—

She was undressed in moments & struggled with his movements. They weren't hurtful but allowed little resistance.

He spoke once, that first time. Quietly, just for her. "Perform, or it will go worse."

He knew her body well which shocked her. Knew her breasts responded to the soft touch & rough one in alteration—touched her down below where she'd often touched herself—places no man had found or been allowed to find—

It was his cock against her thigh that blew her mind. He let it rub her idly down there, loosed her gag, then he started to unlock her manacles & she wrenched insanely—

In an instant it seemed she was bound tightly by arms & mouth, & her thighs wide, & he made his intent plain when in one long clean thrust his cock drove inside her, drove to an inside even her secret fingers had not probed, drove hard past fleshly resistance, & she'd bucked instinctively, & he drove again &, how? harder, deeper. For a moment she passed out. When she came to, she was on her stomach, that flat teasing thing of other days, & she felt his stern hands on her ass & that cock again this time breaking her ass, her will following—again she'd fought, against the million echoes of her cries, against every wall & surface showing her bound & fucked inevitably—"Perform. Or it will go worse." So it went worse. She'd fought. he'd fucked her again. She'd fought. He brought in a bigger man to fuck her, much rougher than he had, less subtlety, none, & made sure she watched him watching her get this other man's cock. Watched, wordless.

Eventually she relented. It was in a less clenched hand, a softer breath. They all do at some point. Whatever why will come later. This is the how.

As she relented his attention changed, he was trying to give her a fucking orgasm!

She knew it, & that he had come close after—it finally happened the night she noticed the window ajar, & made her try. She expected him to really hurt her but instead he spread her thighs in his owning way & set to the most maddening lick of her pussy. She resisted, knew the ajar window had been a trick. He reached up & grasped each of her hands. He squeezed rhythmically & tongued her clit & around her shaven lips, long & longer, slave to this hour, this movement, this pleasure, this final gift she had to give not have wrested from her—

her eyes fluttered open & the ceiling showed him fucking another girl, violently, her face young & terrified as he did—what he did

three hard sharp licks & she exploded—the gag was out & she didn't scream, she yelled, what came out hadn't been there, wasn't her, what the fuck? Just licking her? Just showing her a fuck tape? What? What was it?

She must have passed out awhile because she woke alone. The door unlocked, the way back to the others, but none of them familiar. Nothing to say now. She wanted to go back. She had mattered *much*.

clxiv.

Any wild lands left, find many but fearless do so otherwise they shift to resemble old walls & cries—

I bear softly, sloppily in me much sentiment for old years & remembering is much of what we do, it seems—

Fuck it—praise the old faces & hours & let them be—they're carried along without my company—whatever I comprised in memory or influence—fuck it—

the only music that matters is the one being played, that's all—old music fades, becomes ink & paper, shivers something in someone at best—I look at it, listen, & there's hardly much there—

Remember it all with love & burn it away—what will tuck around, tonight's higher throttling roar let be, what crosses, what slows, fuck it, hard, twice, & off—

I look around Luna T's Cafe's bar & see what's needed of it. The long, dark, L-shaped bar, the TV in the corner, the Jimi Hendrix poster on the wall, the several backs of drinking men, the jukebox in the corner, the heavy swinging door leading to the bandroom—

& what of this place, its floors wooden & sawdust, its several small tables deep-awled with old hours' comments—what of this place, how I've carried it along for something it deeply bears—once I was a tavern-happy drinking man—I raised my glass & bottle & can a thousand times on a thousand nights, roared & believed—& then eventually I did so with less belief—& then I did so with little belief—& then I stopped—but this bar remains—I keep it—whatever I chase in these pages now—however fuck high nutty it cuts through this bar—affects, affected—it happens countless—I continue to live here—

But rouse the old faces for an evening's wet slob through old thirsty glories—no, none. No patience.

I am writing for my life on these pages, the old thirsty mates would not make much of this, fight their own matches with mortality—lose each at his own pace—

Now for a soft moment. Seat beneath me, Rebecca near, she smiles, ever. Love. Muse. Her pad in shadow, hand a slow blur. Love you. Ever young. Love you. Muse. Love you. Love you how the years diminish to other thoughts on time's passages & its meaning. Whatever meaning. You are nearly 26 years old. How did that happen.

Look at Knickerbocker, he hasn't drunk his whiskey in years. Always keeps pace with me, scowls hard & continues.

This the best of it, what resembles a soft moment. Guitars crash hard. Next song.

clxv.

In his dream late he finally has what he wants, his shadows & want loosed, his hands know better than what tie-dye & denim will tell—

most intense near break through, near crack the binds, the glare & crackle bear a map, a direction then another, a way out that does not include return

her breath is shallow, her words are few, enough to tell her fear, her inexperience, her trembling wish to please him, this is his, this hour she bears for him

more, push a little, other full moons, other patches & wide blows of stars, there's music, always music, & often people, smiling strangers, hard, high

she wants to say be gentle, go slow, but she can't talk, can't disturb him with her doubt, her secret retreat, & return, in a heartbeat, less, wee

He takes what he wishes to know

There were moments of sugar, there were kisses in complete cosmos, there were views down mountains & across deserts, there were years of hours lost to watching

When he's rough she flinches but he does not notice & she is sad, my secret isn't there or there—my tremble, my flinch, my watching your face best I can while you strip me, while you try to surround my body, look there—

his lips are cold on her nipples, his mouth hurries, sloppily conquering, she responds leastly & he tries again, his mouth warms, she responds more, this is what he wants, she gives, when her hand slightly touches his back, he bucks, he spasms—

this the single universe? this material illusion, this tightly agreed upon crust of earth & water, slight sentience, teeth reach toward meat, mind toward any novel flicker, heart, etc?

The gentlest moment when he was lifting the cups of her bra, he did it like there would be twin explosions, his breath blew out in several directions, he waited for her to spasm, to fight, but she just watched him silently & the long beast within engaged, how far back the roar for tit & cunt & ass, to make her moan, cry, release, submit? How far back the deviling drive to own for an hour in this single way? How long back did this cruel only want become confused with vague, sacred beings, how deep within are fuck & God twined? Are they bound to music too? They are not deeper, what relation?

Her touch on his back implodes his focus, splatters his brute, he has to beat deeper to recover, has to bruise, to hurt, to make her beg, make her know & make her forget—

Tell me it means anything, tell me history has a traveling arc, tell me polity is not lingual cage,

tell me the hardest longest drives are civil, well-costumed, tradition's stern quiet soldiers—

Tell me. I do not believe you. Tell me you know, tell me it's in this book or that, tell me any man has breached the world beyond men & returned, I say a different man returns,

once you're gone, you're gone

his hand stroked her still covered breast, t-shirt, bra, his fingers pressed & stroked, she knew it wouldn't stop there, knew he would go on, knew she could not stop him—his hand between her thighs, angry when she seemed to resist—resistance did not exist here—a tree may as much fight to keep its fruit from a plucking hand—

clxvi.

The TV's glass screen explodes limply, crackles, sighs. *Trip Town* seems over for the night.

"For porn that was kind of strange."

"It was hard to see anything."

"Hey! You saw her tits! They were fine, weren't they? What else?"

"I just don't like that fruity arthouse crap."

"I think that show is gone. They can't get away with that."

"They just did! You saw it too!"

"I think it's gone. You can't show stuff like that except on, what do ya call, pay TV."

"You're old. They show nearly everything now."

"What happened to the story? Who was that guy?"

"Who cares? First you want more blue, then you want a story line that makes sense! He fucks she, we watch, remember, wank later at bedtime. End of story! Drop the curtain!"

"You're a real asshole, ya know that?"

clxvii.

The songs become extended notes & reach for the dotted swathe, break up into leaves & float off, flame around faster & faster until not possible, not likely, not at all, feel it, feel it harder, something contains you, closer on these hours stretched wide feel it, feel, feel—

Slower, slower, slow, let, let some more, how one off to there, others elsewhere, watch you go til there is no you anymore, call this a dream, call this illusion til daylight & the venal assemblage of things?

Explain a dead man's memory, go on. Explain! I have none. Can you explain any of it?

I remember a street, far from here, miles, years, walking it to reach a restaurant, entering, the hour mine own but I suffered it, feel me returning there now, to that town, that street, that hour, the dusk, the many dusks, now grapple up one of your own, go on, like this, there was no band on my finger, no paycheck in my pocket, I walked that hour blind to this one as I walk this one blind to the next—

the re-building market, the headshop, the hair stylist, the strangers in every direction, the crimson floor, the framed trout, the many misshapen lamps, the deep brown pot of green leaves, faces stare at blinking boxes, others knot together meat & bread—the streets filled with metal engines galloped by electric torches—

Almost a crack enough to escape, close, close. A distant window floors up, loud with light, the old wonder about who & what—the old yen to know—

Almost. Close, close. The rush of old wonder, when it mattered, when I cared. Humming trucks in early morning. Windy desert camps. Somebody love me. Somebody know me. Here's a new day, what possible? What isn't?

clxviii.

She lies before him, perfect, rent, watching, nude, obscure streetlight patches on her thigh, shoulder, he tries to remember, looks, down, did it already happen? He can't remember. Is her face wet, is there fear, is he beginning or continuing, he is strongly motionless for a full minute, when he does next will tell him, how she reacts, does she flinch, crouch, wish to cover that beautiful torso, does she open out for her first, her next, is he? Was another, he wishes to extend this moment, would he make her, does he even want to do this, the moment can't last, who is she? What is this? What happened a minute ago, five, is that blood or shadow between her thigh?

"Please" she says softly, fear, want, what? He tries to think, feeling himself hard below, impatient below, remembering one late night, now so long past, Cordelia was sick & couldn't sleep, wouldn't explain, just radio for hours, that pink radio, the only program she liked that wasn't music, a man talking about alien ghosts, sentient ectoplasm, he flinches remembering Cordelia leaning into him, & now this girl, what is anything?

"Again, it will be better"

"Don't do this please"

"Come closer"

Which words allied with her soft-spoken "please"? In multiple universes multiple truths?

Or none.

clxix.

To ask another what it means any of it, why? I don't do that anymore, don't believe the answers, none have the whole contained & thus & thus—

No. Look down the dim yellow corridor & wish something there, more than alarms & cold winter air, beyond an other, an arrival, a cosmic welcome, a new basket of memories, a stranger tread through unknown air, what would be necessary to make it new again? Make anything new again? Or a push & arrival in a profound next, the untried & seducing by terrifying liquid cries?

What will fill the hours so they haven't an escape? What hard live ether would light up the cracks among creatures as, hark, they fill in tightly?

No answers yet, none smiling engulf—the moment trembles & gives way—

clxx.

Art is guide but does not lead, rouses bone & blood & flesh to eager hours of make but what & how? What of money's poison lure & sex's red distract? What of how others watch, mock with eager compliments & coarse questions? The suck of others, do that work but not right now, have a beer, let's go to this party, blah blah distraction blah blah join the fucking human race you're a fucking freak blah blah

I'm remembering high school hours, study hall hours when I sat alone with my notebooks, lunchtimes when I hid with my books & notebooks, months of days when I didn't go there, I took a dirty bus to a dirty city & revelled in a swatch of freedom—& little has changed in that I still seek to hide with my work, still lure to solitude, why?

I keep asking why. Why? Realizing my books are long past youth's slender dreams of renown. What dream then now? What prize sought here? Is it just fucking habit? What belief throttles this engine?

clxxi.

We share the dark brown craggy pipe again. The hash is even stronger.

"Cheer up! Have a good smoke."

I look at her. "What did you mean to me?"

Her smile does not lessen. "One bad fall, or trick of ill luck, & you will know. Does it have to come to that?"

"I don't know. You're right."

"Do something about it. Squeeze the hours soft & hard. Nobody knows how many or how much left."

I nod.

"Do you believe me or are you bluffing?"

"You're right. I've been pushing myself mirthlessly & hopelessly."

"What then?"

"There's no way back. What remains is memory. I don't even know where to, nothing tells in advance."

"What then?"

"Better breathing. Patience. Awareness. I don't know how to handle daylight's crippling mereness."

"What—"

"I don't need it again. Despair is a mindstate, wide & shallow. It is a muddied puddle, a weak connection, worse things. Loneliness in any setting, any company."

"?"

"I don't know. Acknowledgment."

"Then what?"

"More words. Some of them with the old burn."

"Art is risk. Art is life's best risk."

I nod.

Maya keeps dreaming him, she is different each time, & once he might be Dylan but the dreams keep coming to her & she wonders what, how, so close she can't escape even in sleep? Will he do it? Will he stop Global Wall? It's why she's wanted back, isn't it? She's expected to put him off his guard, the one who got away, the one who befuddled him, has she got this straight? Thinking about it, dreaming about it now, it seems crazy, worse, it seems dangerous & she is scared, she's been scared since—she doesn't know—but somewhere Dylan—if he—would he? Would they? It would be nice, it would be warm & close—she'd left one then another who wanted it, wanted her, wanted something—& she learned to keep moving—& sleep lightly—yet here she was—sleeping hard—she knew it—this happened—a book she'd looked at a long time ago in the library called it lucid dreaming—school library—that had been long ago—they didn't like her going—they had the answers—school was the brainwashing—where am i? I need to do what I do when I'm sleeping like this—here goes—

She concentrates on seeing a wall in front of her, a blue wall, no pictures, & no furniture in front of it—a solid wall she is looking at—now a mirror—square with a thin black frame—sometimes it won't stay black & she lets it become white—but a mirror—there—good—hold, hold—

She is not in the mirror—but she lets herself slowly appear in it—slowly, slowly, breathe, & breathe—remember breathing—her face, head, pink-striped blonde hair—she wavers—become a bit masculine—she pulls back, throbs & spasms—something is trying to stop her—hold

Now her body, it doesn't need to be detailed—why is she naked? She hurries some clothes on but they are thin, short—again, something is blocking her—she pushes, yanks—*there*

Good. Now the trickiest move—she pulls, slowly, tightly, steadily, pulls this image toward her, it has to come out of the mirror unbroken, she has to go slowly, let it emerge, & as she does she quietly breathes from all over this body into her, breathes this form to assume her, still the resistance but it loosens a bit more, a bit more, her thighs last, always last, & her stomach the cap, as it draws into her she is able to snap closed, a twist, a lock, a kiss even—

Good. She starts to look around as hands reach around her from behind and slide beneath her breasts & a large torso presses at her—

She weakens, some pulse to let this happen, let these hands through her gauzy covering, it does not resist him, his fingers play right through she feels more covered in chunks of cotton that can be fingered aside

his mouth on her neck, kissing hard, demands the movement she resists, wants moan, wants writhe, his hands cover her breasts, squeeze, squeeze hard, fingers locked around her nipples making them hurt, demanding, is she still standing? is she nude? is there light? he is all around her as her thighs are nudged open & she is falling through herself as he presses her open wider & wider but somewhere words call to her, somewhere they do as she feels his hips adjust & his hard cock ready for its master's take, words, several of them, & she sends out arcs of hook for them, they are several, they are strange, which are they? How to gather them, what could they do, his hands under her pushing her thighs wider adjusting for his wish, words, you, now, he stiffens harder, words, now, you, he growls, he groans, he squeezes, he hurts a little, you, now, you, now, you, now, you, now, not, you not now, you, not now, he feels for her wet places, not you, not now, not you not now not you! not now! Not You Not Now Not You Not

Now “Not You.” Not now. “Not you. Not now.” & a single wrench of her torso & she is free, she is rising & falling, she is returned, she is awake, here is Dylan. She loves him. Whatever happens, she loves him.

clxxii.

Story nearing something, a crossing something, where there is crumpling & unfolding, a movement in the beams between shadows, what tis, what tis, call it where life leans in & where pulls away, tis, tis,

try again, Maya wakes & feels in her jeans’ inner front-pocket for that scrap, & it’s there, she wishes it wasn’t, & yet, & yet

They have to get going, this place says open most but not all night—

Where to now? She feels like this night should have been over days ago, Dylan is quiet & won’t look at her, John is focused on their being out in the street—

“It’s OK, John, we should go to Dylan’s place.”

He nods but unhappy. “There’s got to be more to this. It can’t just fall back into place & the sun’s up & that’s that.”

Dylan now speaks. “The overpass is near here. I have friends. They make a fire all night. Some don’t sleep very much. There’s lots of blankets to go around.”

“Homeless guys? With her?”

“They know me. They’re nice. They’d help if I ever asked.”

Maya takes Dylan’s arm, not scared but establishing something in her mind. She’d never belonged to anything or anyone before. This was a step for her.

I won’t do it if Dylan says no. If I tell him, & he says no, I won’t.

Dylan quickens their pace & streets fall away. They arrive before she is ready to.

For a moment, fear. Lots of men, shadows. Then Dylan is recognized & these are friends, they see her face first or at least seem too.

“What happened to your place?”

“Yah, we kicked you out!”

“We didn’t get your stuff. You took it right? Not that you had much, but still. Your stuff.”

“This is John. This is Maya. We needed a place to rest for awhile.”

There’s no danger here for her. She had more at her old home. No, here there’s soup, a fire, blankets. She stays near Dylan but, still, she’s OK. He has some standing here. They like him.

She begins to drift.

clxxiii.

What way back to the White Woods, to my cabin? Does he know I’m gone? How do I get back? Can I bring Marie with me somehow? That’s what I want. This one’s made her choice, a good one for her. I’m not convinced I agree but I just want Marie back, is that possible?

Maybe I’m just done with all of it. Marie, if you’ll come with me, we can go wherever. Boss Dogg was paying me nicely. I saw the bank receipts, they looked real enough. Maybe he’ll take back a piece for me leaving no word, but he seemed fair. We’ll have some to go with,

Marie. I'm done with the booze. I'm dry. I'm clean. I want to taste every inch of you with my un-numb tongue.

Tell me how to get to you. Before all this is over.
Mushrooms you cheap fuckers tell me about it! Where? Where is she? How do I get to her?

"Take some of these"
"What are they?"
"They taste nasty but you need a boost right now"
"How did you know?"
"They taste nasty. Here's some water. You don't have to chew them. Just keep them down."

"What?"
"Do you want to find her? Do you want your chance?"
"How do you know?"
"Your boss wants you to do this. He knows it's what's necessary. He'll find a new caretaker. You did a good job though."
"He knows? Are you his assistant?"
"Drink. Swallow. Good. They'll help. Don't worry, you'll see the kids later. They're safer here than most anywhere. Go, John. People are rooting for you. You'll be back here after. Go!"

clxxiv.

Closer, now, truly closer, the edge, the border, closer & I can't say what on comes, can't say why, this many pages in & no answers to why. Few, none.

This night, another night, countless nights but yes, this night, reck its shag & rag of beauties, a bench where tall bare trees beheld a great yowl of stars, a city street where punks & hungers & pets crossed & let cross, briefest in a strange den music too cruelly lit, more streets, more folded figures & laughing others, walking long, walking forever, there's a hand I know well & call my own, walking long, walking forever, nights so many nights, & no, this one, among countless, near it, near it,

A moment, before a yard of white daffodils, no purpose but to bloom, no why, bloom, I watch, how, why, oh, I see, no why, oh—

Night curls & creeps in, deeper in all the time, pushing by what it doesn't care & fluttering wider what it does—

clxxv.

Almost arrived feel it, I'm pushing for it now, that's what I'm about, have to be, there's not much else, the years suck off some & some more—

Just push it, & again, little left so crawl, & some more, nothing impedes but will or its cowardice, push, a little more—

A dream, maybe, but not enough to say that & let be, not enough to let the walls fall by & stars on all sides, no floor or ceiling but what sky explains, not enough, nothing left here in that limited human way, nothing at all, but not enough, none enough, never enough—

speak it. sing it. cowardice to call it dreams & leave it be—no there's much more, eh,
Benny?

 "Always."

 "What say you further?"

 "You're handling it."

 "No counsel?"

 "You don't listen to people, you just write shit down. That's not listening."

 "Yah. Thanks."

 "Listen. You want to raise up ancient psychedelic castles & chase stories through them?
Go on. I invite you to. Twice."

 "But what?"

 "But nothing. Do it! They're there to be written about, dreamed, whatever."

 "That's not much."

 "It's enough. You can do it. Most can't. Most don't get my nod, funny boy. You're
getting it."

clxxvi.

 Why indeed. Why any of it. Sitting some punked out joint with the brick walls & their
gapes through spacetime casually passed by breathers & drinkers—

 Benny's right. I'm clearer. The older dreams are dust left to whatever vibrations I raise
at them. The new ones involve ancient psychedelic temples & how they connect to electrified
hard spaces here & hereon, this much & more

 Closer, very. Soon. Now. Almost.

clxxvii.

 What temple, what such talk, how these pages near such matters, why? Is there belief
still in this book? Is there fragile, is there flutter? What is there left?

 Near, a page or two.

 All that remains from the vicious arc of years is a few songs, a lead guitar bloodied hour, two
words, maybe one—

clxxviii.

 No answer is enough, what would contra this cry, where one is bleeding & waterless,
where another shifts lonely in silk, where another consumes another, where many consume
many, one feeding a chase & capture & kill, another a plastic box unpacked, slaughter here, a
small voice & bright trinkets in a clean shaft of sunshine there, go on, conjure that answer, garb
it in lingua this and that, a red cover, gold burnished type, weekly service Sunday mornings
among the bare trees & colored glass, mid-week spiritual healing gatherings, go on, is it answer
hard & tight, pocked & prickled with nays, a wormy yawp of nots to push the immediate
moment to a watchful distance, or tis it sweet the bright-eyed kind, a human steam of yeas, go
on, touch it, that trembling within, yes to this & this & this too, never enough, no fence, blah,

wisecrack, blah! wisecrack! Stall. Stop. Breathe. Again. OK.

Here is arrival, now, the crumpling, the unfolding, here tis. A day blue & bare & sunshine, a clean chill, here tis, the glint & color no answer, the shadows & brick, no answers, moving flesh rising & sinking, this one, that one, those two, that group with its goslings rushing toward toys designed by coked-up ad execs 3000 miles & more away, no answer, it clicks, it crawls, it squeaks & makes me laugh—

clxxix.

A book several inches thick now & its question & rags & shags in reply, fire it in yet other directions, look blinder if necessary, tell the rest & more, remember, squeeze tight,

arriving in a far city years gone at dawn, a new city, foreign, I was eager & fearful & hungry, I had been here before, & that was years before that, any difference between cities, years—

chop. chop.

it was a girl to see, maybe kiss, I didn't know.

chop. chop. chop-chop. chop!

she was pretty, punkish, I didn't really know her, this didn't change with the press of our flesh—

John looks up & around. He's outside the cabin. Alone, morning.

Stands still, very still. Cold, clear, hard blue sky.

What?

We didn't fit, you see. She wanted sex with some mind stimulation, I wanted Art, I wanted her to fucking pose while I drew her first then fucked her after—

He looks every which way. No Dylan. No Maya. No Portland.

A noise in his cabin. He brings his axe.

A corridor, not a room. No possible end down there, he sets down his axe. Finds an older instrument on the ground, jittering. OK.

I thought I loved her, I'm good at that, & chased her past when it mattered, good at that too.

We all shake with terror sometimes, the Viking said. These words are set up high right now, on a darkly-designed patch of cloth, looking hard for what has no below or above, no rising or fading hour—

a moment in a museum & I was briefly happy, it didn't matter so much I was losing again, the beg in that restaurant later matters less, the neurotic blowjob at midnight, the anemic hug at parting, & nothing else came of any of it save some drinking hours of pain in my lonely company, a few songs til it all moved along—

call the world an illusion I say that's wishful wanting—too real, too contra, too incomplete—but call it an illusion & die & find out then something more or something else—

Another hour, a later year I was in another city's night streets trying not to lose what was left yet I didn't—lost some, not all, another woman—now a mother, now dead or otherwise—now I don't care much—now simply does not stay—

I was poor. I shook with terror sometimes. I used to sit before blinking boxes & conjure

erotic joinings from afar—

John begins running—running hard—is Marie down there? Finally? Hasn't this all been fuck fucking enough?

"What's in the shot, Benny?"

"Nothing. Junk. Whatever."

"Tell me."

"You. Him. Her over there. Everyone. Everything. It's my work. I can't explain it better."

Learn to steer, tell me that one again, learn to steer, I learned that from a bent book of hippies & several hits of LSD—learn to steer, I wrote it on my chalkboard when I came home high, alone, crazy that night—used to do that a lot—come home with acid aphorisms to remember in chalk—

Cecile & I sit with the Artist & pass her craggy pipe back & forth. Two leopard spotted divans while she sways far end of the room to candlelight & rolling late night melodies—

John hears this music too from his somewhere else, cannot figure how to near it, thinks he sniffs Marie in it & growls & moans—

the music comes from deep within Luna T's Cafe, so deep within there are presences not aware there is a Luna T's somewhere out there—

but there is—

another one I only talked to on the phone—another I kissed but only slightly—another I took to a strange film & she shook my hand after—another arrived at the theatre with her boyfriend & his parents—another broke my heart dozen of times, got bored & fucked someone else on her birthday—another made sure I had written evidence of her loathing—another lusted over my long red hair—another kept a block between us as she click-clopped along—another surrounded me by her mocking friends & made sure too—another would have let me fuck her if I hadn't stopped, stricken by my filthy mortal hour—

but, see, I realize now, it's OK, filth is the nature of this universe & I write,

Dear Beloved,

I was wee & I dreamed a woman not knowing of you or what was possible like this. I grew some & learned little for nobody taught much not dead in books or widely-born habit. I grew more but had to break first, break many times, before I knew you.

John reaches the end of the corridor & a blank wall. He leans against it, spits on his olden instrument to spark it, & writes—

RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN TO ME MARIE RETURN
TO MARIE ME RETURN ME TO MARIE RETURN ME MARIE TO MARIE RETURN
ME MARIE TO ME

—and stops suddenly.

What will it sum to when over? That's all. What? Not even why if an answered what—but there won't be will there?

Will there? Will there? Will there?

clxxx.

Revelation is everywhere, always, what of this? What is truly hidden to be revealed? I'm asking hard here.

Start with death, what of it? Told a countless man-tales, none true, just that some stick like sunlight or nightmare, but no, not revealed—

What of love? In its sweet young want, secret notebooks & shy sideglances, in its first raw smack, in the one after counting stops, the kiss after betrayal or capitulation, the best fuck, the worst, which, what of it, now you tell, the wet kiss at dawn & its broken tell of feeling still throbbing in mystery, how about the trashed fuck at 4 am between the weed & the cops & the raw blind of parting—what of it? Revelation?

What of Art? Now you're on *Trip Town: The Musical*, half all-night movie, half dozen leopards feeding on a small doe called God—frenzied high, feel it, when the guitars set their players on fire, feel it, when she lies nude asleep between two gorgeous wet canvases, her mouth gagged, her hands cuffed, her feet tied with hand-made rope—she does not struggle, hurts too much—tries to sleep—she did this to him or her or them, pushed it too hard—

Godd the little half-eaten doe? What of Godd, what of it, them tall buildings of fist-driven faith, the angry push to bring more in—to make sure every babe born doused in the tome & its blankly told instructions—a how to being born, a way to snap open young cunt, a manner for moving the shiny jing among the elders & here's death & how & why—& nothing—just take off your fucking tag & fucking die now—

What of psychedelia? Really what of it? The last frontier & yet—what of it—the small vial of pure LSD-25 come on, dose her because she's cute, now the great night come on, & hark those trees their wise waving tongue, & reckon that fat tit full moon, go on, watch it traipse the treetops, them stars a million hung by strings, go on, & when lure into the quiet woods, when a hand in her blouse & a flinch, shhh this is how the world is, hours of revelation, they said so, shhh, that's why you're tight & round, what would the longest preacher say would he behold this upheld shirt those heavy floating breasts & scoff & when after a few dramatic moments the denim is unpeeled is this revelation too, could be, the lacey pink thongs, the shaven pink lips, the deeply spiraling racial expectation of a cock's demand & take, call you gatherings of humans civilization I call it slavery to order, to fear, go on preacher touch it, she's too bound to move, & she wants it, go on, she believes angels are blue, & all the world is angels, from angels born & to angels bound, she told me so the night I talked to her, the night she came with me, the night ownership of her body & life became mine—

but I've saved her until now oh maybe had a little taste here & there, look at that pink cunt as I push aside the lace—look at those tight lips, now look up there, those nipples beg for the interested touch of finger & tongue & when a treat she deserves hard cock—

I feed her mushrooms & make sure she sleeps in pigtails & a short white nightgown—she doesn't know what was before me—just that she is mine & I am to be pleased—she accepts this—having no choice—

See those tight pussy lips moisten slightly as I stroke them, see her smile as she pleases me, grows wetter, knowing what to do—

When her rose shaped lips have sucked my cock long & slow, & my cum glistens on

her lips I turn on her radio & let her fall to sleep listening to music, cat-shaped radio, white face, pink body, I make sure she is wrapped warmly & her clothes straightened, go on preacher say a word—

say a fucking word—

go on, preacher—

clxxxi.

Deeper still in the Ampitheatre, far in beyond far & hours, Noisy Children such as they remain such a thing are leading their audience in, are urging their audience to let go & become the music itself it's the greatest release this life lets be known, Noisy Children cajoles & each of them is in truth barely holding on, resisting letting go to the music too, being what little keeps all from being unable to come back—

I don't want to come back say many of them—no, learn—learn! let go of it while we hold on to you, gird you as you become music,

Is this safety, is this possibility, is it fixtion anymore, what tis, what of it? Is the music in this no-here & no-how revelation? Is this truly it?

How to tell it how it feels, when nothing's left & yet all is embraced—

imagine becoming water

imagine becoming night

imagine becoming hunger

imagine become love

imagine can you imagine not being you?

becoming the world its every wiggle & flash

becoming the world in its amnesia of time & space

becoming space, unmeasurable, no map, ho ideas, no coming & gone—

just fucking pose—

just fucking pose—

just fucking pose—

clxxxii.

What the path? Sniff within, bear this scent into a fumey world, bear it like map to a somewhere, a nearing, a hope, bear this scent as the goal no can give you, bear it like it bring you bright conclusion, not sink into the wormy woody below but out, out, here & gone like sunlight, what the path? Go on, pick a word, several, or a face, countless, pick a branch, pick a great flapping tome of to-do's & no-no's, pick one sleek she-body or he-body or they-body, press your root to lover's root, believe, go on, what the map? A sound, a melody, orchestra, band, DJ, a low flute when lost in the secret wood of your despair, something acoustic luring you along, into coupling, into glad meals, into the thick dance, dreams, what? No. Dreams are not goals, they smell samely but do not trust that which no other sees too, be ware, be ware, beware the conclusion if another cannot nod too? Me? No. Path? Art. Map? Art. Goal? Art.

Conclusion? Art.

Dylan walks into Luna T's Cafe with Maya by the hand & John close by & the crowd there greets them friendly.

His reply: "Mistakes are a path to God's grace."

His second reply: "A man needs a captain, a boat, & a book."

"Else?" I ask.

His third reply: "Find that best groove down low."

I nod. "No," I add.

His fifth reply: "We all shake in terror sometimes."

John sits down next to Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, as few do. They regard each other & experience clarity between them. Well.

His sixth reply: "The revolution is now, everywhere, always."

Mr. Bob the barman is making Maya a special drink, he's just that day got a blender, & her drink mixes ice & berries & bananas & atop it whipped cream & she smiles & asks for two straws.

"Enough for now" I say to Dylan. He & Maya sit at the far end of the bar where Rebecca & I usually sit.

The regulars look to me about this & I nod.

"Find wisdom among the threads & moments," I say to David who sits with me at the table below the Jim Hendrix at Woodstock poster.

He nods.

"Which way, David?"

He shrugs & looks at the table.

"One could say all paths lead to the grave. You've heard that one."

I nod.

"But it tells us nothing of the paths themselves, or your favorite question. Why?"

I nod again.

"So I don't know which way. You & I are brothers of the pen. Yet we do not deny this world as some do. We don't slight it as test or punishment, or partway from heretofore to hereon."

I laugh.

"We walk solidly in it, as we can, as we are allowed."

I nod a last time.

"Our path is Art's truth even as we could not tell another what this means. Being truth, it does not lend itself to the countless fragments of inquiry."

He nods.

The jukebox rears up.

"Sitting on a hillside
watching all the people . . . die
I'd be much happier on the other . . . side"

acoustic twists through sad pressing strings surround a slow, smart, angry voice—

TripTown the Musical on the TV pulses silently to the jukebox, flesh smacks & crosses on the TV screen, a hand grabs a hand, another over a set of raw lips, a thigh slapped hard, a nipple pinched, a cock squeezed painfully tight—





“They’re locking them today
 They’re throwing away the key
 I wonder who it will be tomorrow
 you or me?”

the guitars steady & harsher, the music tightens & swirls both, the voices echo off each other, there is sorrow, there is warning—

several pushed together, bound, nude, then a shot of a hospital hit by a rocket, & one of two pro boxers, one pummeling the other into prone stillness, the blood audience members cry & cheer & thrown from their bit wrists—

a short skirt pushed up over a tight black thonged ass, & a finger paints in red cum on these round cheeks the word

CONSEQUENCE as a cock pushes its way in—

two men kiss in a darkened diner booth, their hands holding fierce, their hearts beating so hard the TV shakes in its silence—

the world boils in broken blood what more to convince, what great spire of cultic belief will deny, what tall mound of coins, what light new kiss between barely knowing mouths, look at trees the ones a car can drive through & here comes a beastly machine with its hard shovel

the king waves both open hands around, he weeps, he begs, he knows, he *knows*, nobody believes, *nobody believes* but *fuck you all I will serve man & god anyway I know I believe my great suffering heart is enough for all I will save us from them we will go on by my grace, my will, my soul*

Nothing more. I could stop now. Really. What else? If I go on, it’s habit, it’s indulgence, lack of alternatives, simply chase for familiar sensation. Benny shoots up the world, I shoot black ink, have most of my life.

So. I go on. But there’s nothing more. Nothing new. Nothing else.

The night. A song. Loneliness. Nameless yearn. The claws of memory. Imbalance of hope.

Why?

clxxxiii.

Falls, it falls, this book & whatever its faces & events, falling, a perilous arc lower & lower, is there a floor, an end, or an ever dream tumble? You tell me. I can’t. I just write this shit down with no clue about from or to.

Every hour shines, I heard that somewhere, some other page, falling, falling, faster? Possible? I don’t know. Every hour shines, there’s the main thought here, yet what to do, this book into deeper spaces now, less call it falling than a painful evolve, hands clutching each other within a mind’s farthest hour, where to, tell me, or from, that much at least, no—

No.

There’s not much left, you see, the rag ends of such a long trail, & whatever’s left won’t solve or resolve, or do or undo what’s come, you see there is no linearity, one event then the

next means nothing—

“What then?” I ask the Viking.
He smiles at me, & farts loudly.

The window shows bare tree, a raw sky, a landscape where figures move, several fires, what else? There are always drums too, sometimes toward dancing, but elsewhere here’s that damned war again, it never ends, you see, the tribal writhe by bonfire or the assembling of young men for slaughter, the knot explaining all isn’t undaoable, if knot there be—

Falling, call it evolving now, call it something else, the roaring twist lighting each being within, & what resolve would you wish? What end in a story that came from others & tends toward others? What of any kind would it be?

Think on it, then resume here.

clxxxiv.

A noise & Dylan opens his eyes & here is his security guard desk, his clipboard of instructions, his lunch half-eaten, his sandwich in his hand.

Nobody around. The clock on the wall & the newspaper in the corner of the office tell him it’s his first night on the job, again his first night, & about the time he remembers stopping to eat his bag of lunch.

No Maya, no John. What then, & how? Had he dreamed all of that, could such a crazy thing be possible?

He was just with her, at that place where they all seemed weird but friendly. He doesn’t remember the name but something about the moon.

He’s scared, he’s shocked, he’s crazy disappointed. No Maya. No bus trip to the ocean encouraged by his friend. No John. Just him alone.

He puts his head down on the desk to think.

Maya turns in her seat to the Dylan next to her. “What’s that? It was you.”

Dylan shakes his head. “Not me. It was him. The one on that TV show they like here.” He stops. Knowing more wouldn’t mean much. Let her deal with all this for now.

“You’re Dylan & he’s not?”

“I’m my own Dylan. He’s on a TV show.”

Maya’s face wrinkles & shifts in thought. “How can there be two?”

One of the drinkers speaks up. “That’s how the world works.”

They wait for him to say more.

Now self-conscious of several looking at him, he only manages: “That’s how I see it. Doppelgängers, polar opposites. It’s hard to get away from once you notice it.”

The Viking farts loudly several times by way of explanation & several laugh briefly.

Dylan on TripTown listens to a throbbing sound just begun. It’s not in the room with him so he leaves it to investigate. Louder as he walks the empty lit corridors of the building. Floor by floor, the throbbing increases.

Top floor & he comes through the stairway door to silence. Nothing. What now?
 “What now?” he asks nobody.

Dylan at Luna T’s turns from the TV, shaken. Maya leans to him. John looks over & watches to see if he can help. Dylan’s head shakes at a softly spoke question from Maya. He stands, & walks uncertainly toward the heavy swinging door to Luna T’s bandroom.

clxxxv.

Maya wakes, in a dimly lit room, on a bed, under several heavy blankets. She can sense she’s wearing few clothes. The room is full of furniture & shadowy objects. She doesn’t feel much familiarity with it.

The door opens & a man steps in & shuts it again.

He walks slowly over to the bed & gets in. Maya freezes as he gets under the covers, & this turns to white panic as she feels by his movements that he’s undressing. He doesn’t speak or much acknowledge her until he is done. Then he turns to face her & speaks.

“I didn’t think I’d see you again.”

She doesn’t reply.

“Your request is being handled. The whole apparatus is being undone. Everyone but you & me will be gone by morning. Then we will leave. I followed what you asked precisely.”

Now he moves closer to her, intent to hold & possess her, as she’d agreed. She is still paralyzed as she is gently held, firmly touched, there is no hesitancy in his movements or fear. He has arranged this with her & she has come of her free will to his bed, dressed in the clothes he put out for her, followed a few written instructions on preparing her hair & body, washed & bathed & primed to his specs. Now he is making his full claim as his great process is disassembled by unknown others.

His hand reaches under her very short nightie to hold & tease & cup her breasts, & she is just about to cry out when a heavy throbbing fills the room’s every inch.

clxxxvi.

The ocean approaches, they can both hear it, always that last climb to see it. He is ahead of her but stops to help her up, she takes his hand & wants the rest, you don’t know, boy, what’s in me, deeper than anything you could imagine, yet, I think I want you to know, & when he begins to loose her hand in his shy way she won’t let him, let the ocean see what we are, let this moment be the truth I’ve always wanted, not knowing what truth would be like when I found it, I’ve found it, here it is—

Dylan is quiet, she can hardly see his face, but thinks he’s watching the ocean, thinks he’s overwhelmed by it, by her hand which won’t let his go—

throbbing, a strong hard beat & a hand slowly down her thigh & the barest of voices says moan for me Maya

have you seen the ocean before asks Dylan in the dusky murk & she shakes her head even though she had, she was brought here years ago & told to regard how little she was & to look & *look*

at me Maya this is your truth now, hand moving across her thigh now

we should go closer
 there is no final truth, none, your church teaches this & nothing is greater to know it
 will guide your whole life to better places if you let it
 move your thighs apart, slowly, you understand how it must be now, now that we've
 agreed

he tries to go slower, knowing this moment is what he's waited for & life hereafter will
 be a little lesser

"You'll fall at your least moment!" he had last cried, no more speeches after this one, no
 more books, the perfection of her & none else, her essence added to the rest, the elixir finished,
 the study & preparation,

"I have none else to say after tonight, no more books, no more speeches, my voice will
 recede from you like the night's gnashing frost & you close the door & near the fireplace"

perfection here, in this, & tap more than vulnerable places in reality, breach more than
 a hidden bubble of multi-dimensional escape, flick the material universe off, yet, but fucking
 more,

"None of this matters much, in truth, nothing! Neither the flight nor the arrival, nor
 the wings it took! Nothing!"

She breathes hard & he drinks this breath in, his fingers curling around the pink thong
 he'd clothed her in, feeling it twist, resist his intent then its seams tearing upon his will & the
 other hand to her opening lips shhh this is how it is now—

the sun a rim of raw red flame on the horizon, they sit on the sand next to each other,
 she's lost his hand as he watches & gestures & smiles & is glad of her company, she heats &
 heats more

"My dreams of ice are upon me now, there's nothing else for me to do but ready myself
 for they will make for me inexorably now, I cannot trick them in the old ways—"

His hands pushing her nightie up, forcing its thin fabric apart as he moves to mount
 her, break her open & consume her there is nothing else to this yet there is nothing else yet

Dylan pulls from his pocket the bag of mushrooms he'd brought out earlier—later?
 when?—& he looks at her doubtfully & she takes the bag & smiles

"not you not now" she whispers "not you not now not you not now" his hands on her
 uncovered breasts his thighs prying open hers wide his cock blind greedy focused on foraging
 to its prize "not you not now I want him make it him"

they eat slowly, feeding each other she is calm the white panic is the night's first star she
 lets it no closer

moan for me Maya his cock grazes lightly her bare pussy lips "not you not now I want
 him not you not now I want him" moan for me Maya or I will hurt you she moans loudly &
 his cock convulses with hunger but presses just lightly inside her

they chew & they chew

"Would you take anything with you from this it's the knowing that you contributed,
 each one of you, to the crack I'm going to make, the way out, I don't know to where or what,
 but each one of you—"

She releases to the mushrooms in a moment, a flicker's flicker, letting them as she had
 not, could not before, & they take her, uplift her, raise her, her arms is tight around Dylan as
 they go, fall up, rise within, twist among each other

throbbing throbbing throbbing as Dylan arrives, slams into Global Wall's body so hard

he disappears, what is happening? What? The mushrooms explode, the moment explodes, the world explodes there is nothing & everything at once is this possible?

Global Wall pauses. "Each one of you can only thank me for all of this, all you were a part, of, & the promise of what may happen yet for you."

Still, everything. Still, nothing. Both, & this continuing chaos, an hourless hour, a worldless place, no sense, no flesh, no language

Nothing, everything.

Everything, nothing.

clxxxvii.

How do you steer a boat on God's own sea? Rudy has been asking that question a long time, so long he's forgotten it's not his own, he was given that question, some years back it's true, but nonetheless—

Was it years? He has to suppose so—seems like having the sight has never helped his memory—would he even wish it had? What would he wish if he could.

Now that's a sad thing. A man without a wish. Hopes are different things. They bite, they join in your day, pick your door among the many which number you dial on the phone—wishes, now them's other things—

You're talking like an old colored man, Rudy. Yes, I guess I am. That's my choosing today, my way of coping without the comfortable mask everyone wears, I get to pick a new one *every day*—I don't have mine—I have no illusions—I've seen *what is & what's to be*—

He hears the sounds in John's head as he runs for that bus—the anguish, the lust—the sound of fabric tearing, of flesh compelled, of taking, & taking again

there is no end to it really.

How do you steer a boat on God's own sea? You take your oar & you beat at the boards below your feet—beat at them & scream & beat at them some more until you sink—& you drown—& you give your reply—your sea, your boat—*my will, my death*—

Traps & doors. Traps & doors. The tricks of perception, & interpretation. Which hand grasps my wrist, which torso presses me down, which thighs hug my own. Which? I don't know. They told me back there that there is no final truth. What then?

For a moment, a pool, a reflection, not my face, a softer one, a prettier one, the one he wants, the one he dreams, I am his wish, that's all I want to be, his wish, his Cordelia—

The explosion is more a series of them simultaneously, meant not simply to bring down the immense mansion but to crack & crush the endless bunker beneath, the city of villages, the years, the cries, the bondage tools, the tryptomynic mind-fuckery, the pacts ceding or leasing power centuries raised, the deep throbbing engines of moonlight, the arcing skylines of blood-heavy sadness, roots below roots, what bears the earth herself, reaching back before time & then around & through & multiply, creating an echoing cacophony one can nearly call the creation itself were one to see in limited, wishful terms but there is more to this you see mistakes are one way to God's grace someone else says and her clean teeth bit the shoulder nearest & she slowly roars **FUCK ME HARDER** pushes this shoulder over & mounts him

not caring what he is only that her thighs need cock & a whole civilization mocks & interferes with this *constant fucking need* & her hips move good move dirty because they know how & fucking is called dirty but when the cock is driving up & in *UP & IN* it doesn't fucking matter *more harder more harder* the need to ride *harder & bigger & deeper* & I'll take it I don't *care who you are just fuck me harder*

“What a fucking slut!”

Ride him, you bitch!”

The boys at Luna T's bar overcome their shock & are ready for *Triptown* to go porn, hard long porn—they roar for drink—

“Who's fucking who!”

“Who the fuck cares? Look at them titties go! Look at that cocksucking mouth!”

The explosions become rhythmic now, & nearer, seeming timed to arrive here last

come as a man not a mist,
just fucking cum long & hard

nothing departs & nothing ever returns

world boils in blood, men & their cities & their monuments a moment's froth

harder, oh, harder

please stop please duct tape on the pretty mouth, pretty white blouse torn open, pretty underthings torn too, one lusts for it, one cries, the one fleeing is caught, & trained, til her pretty round ass knows a cock's pleasure, many cocks' pleasures, which drives the world, any that don't the world breeding & consumption & waste & a few tinkles of starlight as the shit mounts to a mute sky—toward lords of the planet, some say, soon come to claim their ripe prize—

clxxxviii.

Maya finds Dylan on the landing sitting hear a large floppy eared grey bunny.

“I talk to him sometimes”

“Is he friendly?”

“He said to take care of you when you let me”

Maya smiles & kisses Dylan on his soft, untried lips, kisses him for every hour she's known him & every hour she waited for him, for things still possible & those not, hopes & wishes, the difference between them, kisses him lips to lips nothing more nothing else not this moment here

Maya throbs beneath John as he pushes her pink thong aside & his fingers slide up & down her mad hot cunt lips wildly desperate for that cock it can smell nearby

Maya struggles as Global Wall binds her hands & shreds her clothing, tongue tasting her cherry cunt's reluctant juice but he knows how to release it, knows its dark trails, ravines to

draw it through

Maya holds Dylan's hand as the gut-red sun swallows the trembling waters on its descent—holds his hand & feels her heart jive within, sweetly, devilishly, secretly jive

clxxxix.

What then, call it an arc from sac of water to stretch of soil, or reach a little more & say that sweet, dirty or mundane orgasm was your begin & maybe something else not buried in the box, call your life that orgasm's arc through this world from a heretofore to a hereafter or laugh & snort at time, call the cosmos a great orgasm, a vastless cry compelling countless worlds, awhile, to be—

Any of this helping? World boils in blood? Call that not enough. World a damned tangle, bark twice & bite with all ye be, but, why, & what, be ye? Not helping? Not with the rough roaring chutes & the bright shallow eyes calling the run through a life, & what of it? Burn a carcass for its sparkling sing into the stars? A half dozen knives to the bones & everyone feeds & weeps & keeps a little?

No, none of it helps. Sac of water, stretch of soil. In between the movement from one crowded lowing van to the next. Dreams tell plainly but in a tongue for the soul who easily speaks bloom & breeze, river's fine noisy flow, & its merest kindred stream dark in its close viney solitude countless tome, if tomes at your farthest sight is all ye see—

cxc.

What then, three twists & show it to all, that truest vein in things, so close, come on, tell it! That coin blaring the great final rule of thing, that myth of a mortal god, another advising the honied beast of denial, the ones who sneer at all, the ones who find it i selected faces—

“He's running low”

“Think so?”

Not enough empathy, craft your great cry from this wood & cloud. Go on, maybe that then.

She doesn't want to leave. Nothing back there matters. There is no explanation for this . . . this expulsion. This is her home, her life. What he said made no sense to her.

Her duties, over? She prepared the new ones, dressed them, instructed them. Her own hours with him came most often in dreams, but she is taught these are not usual dreams. She wakes from them embraced, sore, *had, fucked, loved*. He loves her. He loves them all.

The last one she prepared was only two days ago. Long strawberry blonde hair. Viciously erotic little figure. Made it rough on herself.

Wouldn't dress in the ribbons & the gauze.

“This is how it is here.”

“Why? Let me go!”

“This is where you belong now. To him. Like all of us.”

“I don't want to. Please help me. I want to go home now.”

"There's only one rule here. Pleasing him, sooner or later."

"No. I don't. I can't. I haven't."

It took hours. It took tears & screams, begging, bargaining. Cordelia was kind, firm, patient, pushing her new charge along the path to acceptance. A big sister.

Finally, the preparation. Oh this one was good, Global would be pleased. When her costume came, Cordelia knew for sure he had been watching. There was a shade of pink in ribbon, nightie, panties, a pure, light, cloudly-ache of a pink. Her bath was a certain sign, too. The camera prompts & lights told Cordelia to pose Fiona, to go slowly, to make her laugh, to join her in the bath & whisper to her secrets few learned so soon if ever.

They soaped each other & Fiona laughed a so-naughty laugh & when she was embraced & her perfect pink virgin pussy stroked she listened in sudden fear but overriding curiosity.

"I'm going to tell you something secret, something I tell few."

"What?" A bare whisper.

"When he takes you" she flinches "Hold strong, remember my lessons!" she relaxes some "When he takes you, when he bursts you open, your virginal essence will contribute to something special, something perfect" breathing, listening "He picked you from many, don't let him down. Don't let me down, Fiona." Maybe tears, maybe a bit of pulling away. Maybe a warning in that.

Cordelia was not in the room when Fiona was taken. But by a rare gift she was present, in her own bed, but dressed just like Fiona, the aftertaste of the drug dissipating as she joined Fiona & was let experience everything Fiona did. Not a psychedelic, none would submit to such a narrow harnessing, more a vaguely tryptominic neurotransmitter. A gift, whatever it was.

To be taken by him again, this the closest to that first time, & to her horror Fiona forgot her entire training when the lights gave way to candles & insense, & the door opened.

It was rough, Global was quickly angered, more angry than in awhile. The cuffs on her hands were tight enough to hurt. His fingers were brutal, Cordelia nearly bailed out but want, long tearing want kept her there.

Fiona cried, loudly as her nightie was torn in pieces & stuffed so deeply in her mouth she could barely breathe. Global did not remove her panties at first. He poked at them, pulled at them, terrifying her, playing with her, cruel & precise, flipped her over & with two hands removed the ass side. Stroked her ass, her sweet untapped round ass, several times as she tried to move, moaned barely, then he leaned down & bit her left cheek. Hard. She screamed til her gag flew out. He did not replace it but leaned to the right & bit her other ass cheek.

[Please, Global.]

[I let you participate not direct! Are you not enjoying your gift?]

[She's just panicked. I taught her well. Slow down. It will be better.]

Global rolls Fiona over.

"Will you stop that if I'm gentler?"

She doesn't answer. Whimpers. Breathes hard.

"Very well" & starts to roll her over again.

"Yes! Yes! Please. Yes."

Testing this, Global peals her panties from her perfect cunt. She remains still, tears, but still.

Now was over. Why, Global?

cxc.

“What is desire?” I ask Grant, having met him in his lair, his hid place in Luna T’s Cafe.

He holds in his hand a shifting image . . . sunflower shifts to full moonlight shifts to a heavy rhythmic thumping shifts to a forest bursting with insect & animal & leafblowing noise shifts to the ocean’s long growl . . . shifts to a woman’s widely spread young thighs & moaning pink lips shifts to . . . a black pen on white sheets . . . shifts . . . to a city raised up in flood & blown away . . . shifts . . . to . . . to . . . a child’s first ugly steps, wild & true . . . shi . . . fts . . . t . . . oo . . . eyes shutting & a great light drowning all material . . . forms shifts . . . to . . . images too fast to know . . . shifts

“stop”

“code & key, that’s what” he lights up a very fat cigar & puffs shrouds of smoke about him, I speak to his cloud

“What then? Can my mortal enemy oppose me & tell me true?”

Puff. Puff. “I think *only* your mortal enemy can tell you true. The rest have something at stake. I have nothing.”

“Not defeating me?”

“You misunderstand. I don’t wish to defeat you. When you go, I go.”

“I misunderstood then.”

“Indubitably. But I do oppose you.”

“On what grounds?”

“You fancy Art a sacred matter & your best activity on earth its performance.”

“True.”

“No!” Puff! Puff! Puff! “I oppose you on those grounds. I will to stop you.”

“How?”

Single, long puff, a great mull of a puff. “It’s a matter of path, keeping to the known & useless one, or beginning to work away from it.”

“I am not working away from it.”

“Not yet.” Puff. Puff.

cxcii.

Maya dreams she’s riding a bus to the Oregon coast & a strange boy gets on board & she decides to take a chance, talk to him, he looks sweet.

He sits in the aisle seat across from hers & she shudders within from the one look he gave her, he started as though he knew her, then turned away.

She wants to speak, wants badly to do something other than she is doing.

She watches him obscurely, reading.

He falls asleep. Against the window. She’s frozen. Something that was supposed to happen doesn’t.

She keeps reading where, it seems, she hadn’t, tries to pick a random page though she does not believe in randomness.

She reads: "I know you will come back to me, Maya"—

Oh. Shit. He's still sleeping. Very still.

"& you will help me to finish my project. I was scared before & sent you away. I don't have other options than this, than you. I got scared. For all I've done, for all I shouldn't fear & do not, at least anymore, I only, truly fear this one thing. Its failure."

She looks up quickly. He stirs. Something is wrong here, this isn't how it's supposed to happen.

"When you call my man he will grant your wish. I already know what you want. It's what I want too, it's where & how our paths, & desires, cross. We want freedom, to love, to choose, deep into the engines of our souls, undo, re-imagine, choose other."

He's stirring, he's facing her.

"I'm going to release you, Maya, in the moment you give yourself to me, the White Woods will burn down finally, & out of history."

Dylan looks at her, waking, smiling, shocking her deeply, she feels the deep shake, the brutal sweet eruption deeper within her loins than she has known, feels it like an emotional convulse, & again, harder, she cries out, told to moan, she cries out again, told to moan louder, she gives over to her body's long cries of want & sensation, release to greater shocking convulse to greater release.

Burn down the White Woods.

Burn down the White Woods.

Burn down the White Woods.

John opens his eyes to the familiar color of a violet sweater, its long-loved shape, the voice above, the hands about. Dream, delusion? Which fucked-up game this time?

"None, John."

"Marie."

"A man, not a mist."

"I think so."

"What about your friends?"

"I don't know. Nothing happened with the girl."

"I figured that out. Would you have?"

"If there wasn't you, in my heart, impressed upon my loins, as deep in me as anyone has ever been, I don't know. But love doesn't work like that. You don't forget other paths. You just choose to stay on your own."

Silence. "You said love."

"I love you, Marie."

Dylan & Marie wake up next to each other in his rooming house bed. Beneath his Mickey Mouse comforter, clothed. Close. A shyness surrounds them.

"Are we awake?"

"I think so."

"I'm not sure what's real."

"Me neither."

The crowd at Luna T's roars at the TV when it dims. "Oh come on!" "What kind of ending is

that?" "We want more porn scenes!" "What happened?"
 Tom shakes his head at me. "Is that enough? For you?"
 I stare at wood. "No. There's more."
 "More titties?" some drinker barks.
 I stare.

cxciii.

What were any of those nights, those countless people met, passed by, touched, who? Here is another night, nameless, a visual phenomenon, a biological affect, here it is & I don't know what it means, I am crawled out here on the esoteric edges of things, & do not feel what differentiates anything—

"What's he saying?"
 "Hey, buddy, you OK? It's Tom. The Professor. We were just talking."
 "Yah."
 "Talk to us. come on."
 "There's nothing left to this. I've asked why for nearly 600 pages & fifteen fucking months, and, nothing. Why? Because. Fucking Why? Fucking Because."
 "Yah. What did you expect?"
 "Something."
 "Hey. Is she OK? Maya. And Dylan."
 "And John."
 "How about Rudy?"
 "And Global Wall? What's he doing all that for?"
 "We want to know."
 "I don't know. Stay tuned. None of this is worth jack."
 "Not if you only grab at the biggest question."
 "Why is the only question."
 "Look around you. The world is your answer. Dreams. Secrets. Beauty."
 "Yah. Thanks."
 I look at Rebecca. "Tell me."
 She smiles. "We answer why by our own hands." I sigh. "Don't, Raymond. You know this is as much as anyone gets. Every answer roots in quicksand."
 "Even Art?" She stares at me. I nod.

cxciv.

It had come down to a simple request to the Universe, a willingness to breach back, to orgasm the years in reverse, to cross over & resume his path from a ways back—

To reach over the years to the first moment when want betrayed him, when he was told he was nothing, shit-nothing—

To make a different decision, compelling this alternative action, this key moment, all had been contrived to negate how things had gone, how the years had developed their brutal interior, how success would mean revenge for the longest time—

Then he discovered, simply, how to gain a chance to try again, & everything became

slave to this goal, to the how, to the girl who would release him, give him his chance, to undo, just one different step, one clear communication from a disintegrating, already told future, just one clear instruction, a much younger self, the chance, the wild chance he would listen, he had let everything evolve in that life to bring him to the moment when he would be flung, a catastrophic arc through the ethers of reality, tearing, breaking, disappearing, each year, each hour, all that had happened, burn the White Woods? Deeper than you know. Burn out of existence, through nothingness, through possibility, through conception itself. Gone. Gone's gone. Perpetual not-being.

Unless he doesn't listen.

cxcv.

Again, half dozen touches in this book, poor folks' cafeteria & called it a report card a several hundred pages ago, so what's the grade, aye? Much, any? What the truth this hour, scratch twice & what shows?

What detritus tells it, the photos of great ball players old & new on that newspaper box out the window? Blank grey light cracks between buildings? The old professor with square black glasses & sparsely hair pate, at his reading? The greasy mediocre food heating & selling, heating & selling til the remaining hour empties down? This bright lovely blue fishtank incongruous among the cheaply passing time here? Go on, tell it.

I began this book here nearly 15 months ago, took a try or two to make it stick—but it did—Kept pushing it, months thick of pages & lean, intended to finish it last December, didn't, pushed along anyway—through its brutal & its sweet—it's as little known as anything I've written in many years, decades?

Across the street a parking garage, nothing the ancients could have imagined, or those even nearer to now.

A circular dining area. Dining? Feeding maybe? Blue swivel seats bolted into the floor. Fake brick flooring, a view of several traffic intersections. What was this moment supposed to mean?

There was a man I saw here twice, eating salad with a palsied hand. He got thrown out. Someone did. I hadn't returned before tonight, in 10 months. Maybe once to eat with the wife. Tonight I came alone, pages dwindling, goodbye & thank you.

cxcvi.

So. The long arcing shot toward fini, the arriving & leaving swish, the go, good go, again, gone & later there's again.

Someone shouts: "They all sound the same!"

Shout back: "It's all one song!"

There's no other explain, pages accumulate by the hour, by the book, by the years, by the great flopping pieces of a whole lifetime.

Why? Fucking because.

Why? I don't know.

Why? Keep asking.

"Do we get to keep that TV show next time?"

"We like it! Not like baseball, or football"

"Or hockey"

"Or basketball"

"Or the Olympics"

"Especially the girls skating!"

A roar goes up at that one.

"Does that Maya skate?"

"Nah she's a raver chick. They dance."

"Ha! Nice word for it!"

Tom settles his people down. 'His' people, heh.

"We like it. That's all. Just letting you know."

"Thanks."

How does it end? Does Global Wall get his wish? Create the paradox necessary to swallow his & all the others' pain unto negation, the White Woods gone, Red Dog gone too?

Just a word & it goes away, all of it.

And Maya? Would she have been on that bus to meet Dylan?

Would John have come through his many fucked up hours to lay simply his love at his Marie's feet?

Dearly wish to undo yet undo any undo all

Is there anything to be freed of the tangle?

Does "Why"/"Because" have any indefensible side?

I look at Grant a last time. He shrugs. "I'm sentimental. I'll let you have a try at a good ending."

What can I give in this late tired hour, where the new sweet within me, where has the rust not tried, what inviolate from the great heaves of regret & sadness?

Not much, many. But I think: here I sit, trying, art the true, best meat I've known, what's left when the cynics & bastards & collectors have each come & went

In the worst of it I simply fed my woes to Art, nights recall to me, the simple slash of human mixing, & again & again I turned to my pen & notebooks

I don't know why

Past belief in the brotherhood of the bottle—past belief in the cosmic recreative effects of new pussy—past most & all—past all essentially—

I don't believe in truth but I do believe in Art

in Music—

The best & worst of it is desire—where the explanations fail & good intentions crack—

cxcvii.

Noisy Children for a stretch back on Luna T's Cafe's stage, corporeal, five musicians, a crowd, the night in itself good enough—

fades in & out

metaphor's static
there they were—

cxcviii.

Fixtion is contingency. Nothing is truly gone which cannot be, literally, summed at a word.

Nothing I say here cannot be unsaid.
Nothing true, nothing even false. Letters on a page. Tick-tock.
I call it my music.
It endures me.

cxcix.

What, then, when nothing's impossible but what desired needs to be made from the materials at hand, what comes to be *comes* to be, made unto the world, its new moment, its next.

Did this book answer why? Or did it simply ask. Is it a question or an answer.

"Barkeep, talk to him."

"You OK, son?"

"Yah. I don't know what to do with these fundamental matters."

"Do?"

"I have this pen, when it opens up, it matters. I know this. I've spent a long time in the dark stretch of this book, angry, I don't know if sufferings within flesh are anything more than passing—

What do the years remain, what was noise & trinket—

What near, what far, what matter breaches the years & miles? What did I learn. Someone asked me & all I could say was something about music & dreams & kindness.

"It's OK, son."

"You're fixtional."

"So are you."

"True."

I think the White Woods does burn. Every last page.

I think Maya might see Dylan again but . . . not now

I think Red Dog Restaurant is so deep into the Psychedelic Revolution nobody notices. Call the seed a revolutionary for bringing something new into this endangered world?

Global Wall, what of him, I think something of him goes on, I think something like him always goes on, want springs hard toward the world like dancing fingers or a fist, hearts taught to uncurl or elude, one finds a different set of counsels listening to one year or another

What then. Why? Ask it, answer it, follow, deny it?

I've tried to figure it, the interior borders of want, & have not found them, the bloom sings ever closer, tendrils through dream, where the fine glance arcs breathless hours & which fine glance this time—which one?

cc.

I asked how to finish for I've never known how & endings seem less finales than pause, breathe, resume.

What answer enough, not a glare & incomplete, not a chorus loud enough to obscure the music, suck on the bars & believe them branches to the sun, & comes the night the cries are samely spectral, a dream cracked eyes wide, what is this, then, neither sleep nor wake, the rhythm faster, melody a great tide of fingers, regard the chaos nod & give its fruit—there. There! The sky opens first with stars then with more—

Smooth, slow, slower. Nothing goes away, nothing returns. Keep passing the pipe, sharing the bread. Keep the water clean & going around. When the king speaks soothe in words of war, stay there & no more. When the preacher comforts from tomes & hard-grooved ritual, stay there & no more. When the yearn flails, when it does not know, when it wilds in shaggy darkness & untaught twist—

We watch Dylan return to his friends under the bridge, them happy to see him, the credits rolling, someone was right, it couldn't last, plans for a movie? Plans for an online collaborative community? Plans to build a real *Trip Town*? Oh sure. The credits make no sense anyway, but we watch them & there's Dylan talking to his friends, a fire nearby, the camera panning back now, the fire distant, the movie a long strip little else, the line of comic books made from White Woods paper, the delusions, one & another, a hand reaches across & touches, a breath, another, which word now? Any?

Hours, plain & golden. Memories, little enough. The question, & its many answers. A touch. A breath. Which word now?

4-22-2006
Seattle, Washington



Notes on Contributors

Jim Burke III lives in Hartford, Connecticut. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 67 | December 2008. I've learned more from listening to him play guitar than any dozen schoolbooks.

Joe Ciccone lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 65 | June 2008. One night years ago he & I walked into a swamp, met a cowboy ghost. Have we come back?

G.C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His fiction last appeared in *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009. There was a story we wrote once years ago; it's in a folder in an attic; what lost years it yet contains.

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009. That day we walked through a hotel, talking, talking. Those words linger . . .

Christopher Patrick Gose lives in New Mexico. His writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009. He trekked deep into the jungle to write the magical words in this issue.

Judh Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009. Almost whatever crazy poem of mine you read in this issue, she's read it first.

Galway Kinnell was born in 1927 in Providence, Rhode Island, & currently lives in Vermont. He's published over a dozen books of poetry & was awarded the National Book Award & Pulitzer Prize in 1980.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Portland, Oregon. The better this journal looks, the more her fine hand at design is evident. Long way from the worst of cut-n-paste days.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Portland, Oregon. This issue is not every page or line of my creation, yet I leave something behind with each one, something of the best of me.

